CASUAL GAME INSIDER

Holi
Festival of Colors

SPIEL DIGITAL
A worldwide gathering of gamers goes online — read our highlights

LICENSED GAMES
8 great games with a licensed theme (that aren't just cash grabs)

ROB CRAMER'S
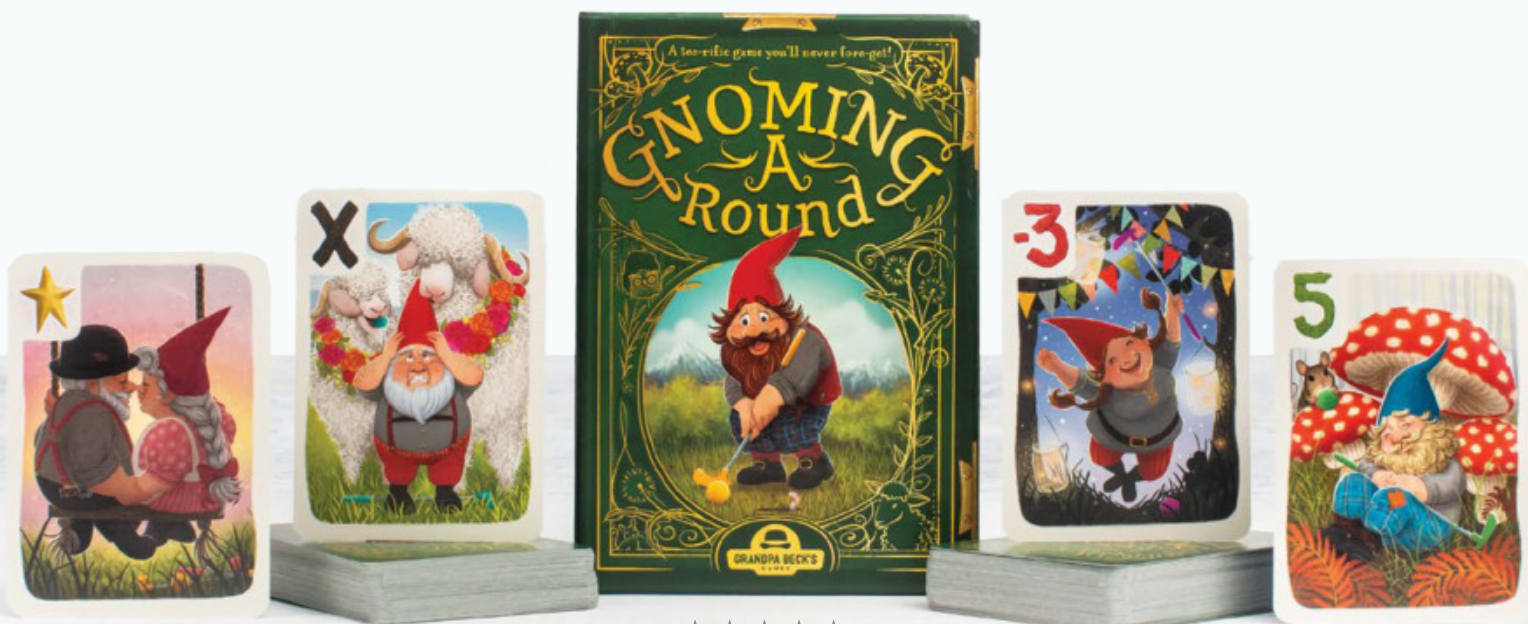### TURBO DRIFT

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And it was fun for me too!

– Amazon Reviewer

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ECLIPSE DICE

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GATE KEEPER GAMES

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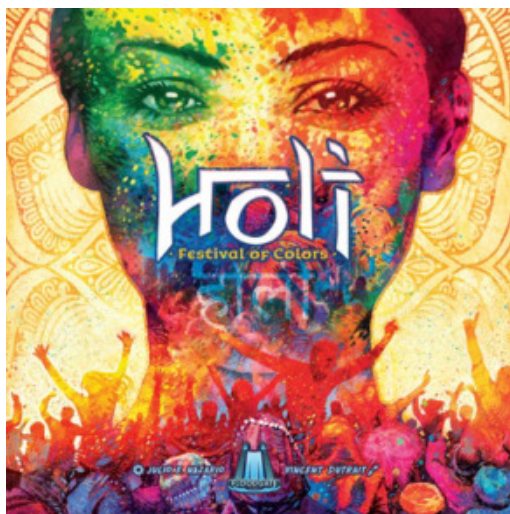
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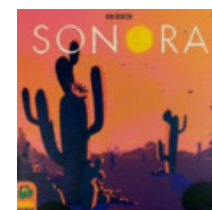
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"A casual board (or card) game is played in under an hour, set up and taught in under 10 minutes, and requires some light strategic thought. Casual games are not specifically marketed to children, but can be enjoyed by anyone from older children to adults."

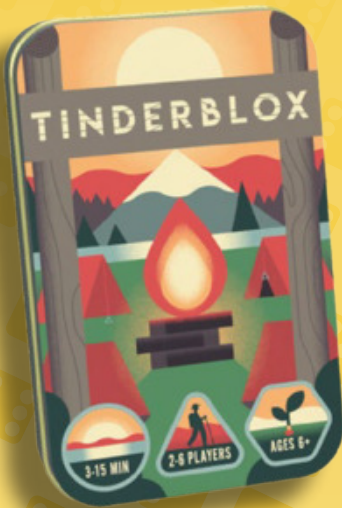Floodgate Games creates everlasting experiences through gaming. Our games use immersive aesthetics and clever gameplay to provide gamers and their communities an experience that not only tells a story, but creates one to take away.

Floodgate.games

Bezier Games makes richly themed, accessible, ever-changing games for friends and family. Games such as *One Night Ultimate Werewolf* and *Castles of Mad King Ludwig* are the new classics — the first game you open on game night and the last one you put away.

BezierGames.com

Lucky Duck Games is an international tabletop game publisher on a mission to bring highly innovative and engaging board games to all tables.

LuckyDuckGames.com

The Op, also known as usaopoly, is behind your favorite board games & puzzles with brands fans love. We are passionate about bringing family & friends together to create memorable experiences through play!

TheOp.games

Alley Cat Games are an independent board game publisher, releasing titles such as *Dice Hospital* and *Chocolate Factory*. We focus on creating unique tabletop experiences that are bursting with theme.

AlleyCatGames.com

Smirk & Dagger thrills to create games that cause a stir...richly themed games designed to make you 'feel' something when you play.

SmirkAndDagger.com

Czech Games Edition is a group of people who love board games and enjoy creating them for players like themselves. They've produced over 40 board games and expansions, including *Codenames*, *Sanctum*, *Letter Jam*, *Tzolk'in*, and *Through the Ages*.

CzechGames.com

Quick Simple Fun Games has been in business since 2015, and has learned a lot in that time. We are bringing fun games that are easy to learn to our community.

QuickSimpleFun.com

Gate Keeper Games exists to actualize epic game ideas and treat every guest like they are a dear friend in our home. Creator of *The King's Armory*, *Halfsies Dice*, and many other popular game and dice products.

GateKeeperGaming.com

Arcane Wonders, founded in 2012 by Bryan Pope, publishes strategic, competitive, and social board and card games to enjoy with your friends, including *Mage Wars*, *Sheriff of Nottingham*, and *Onitama*.

ArcaneWonders.com

Game time is quality time! Our four award-winning games have gone from our kitchen table to homes in many countries. When you want an engaging, portable, fun game, remember Grandpa Beck's Games!

GrandpaBecksGames.com

IELLO is a globally recognized board game publisher. IELLO's goal is to bring the world games that are irresistible, intriguing enough to pick up, and impossible to put down.

IELLOUSA.com

Fireside Games publishes highly thematic games for a casual good time! You can defend your castle against monsters (*Castle Panic*), collect the most cats (*Here, Kitty, Kitty!*), fight off bears (*Bears!*), build steampunk airships (*Dastardly Dirigibles*), and cast spells on villagers (*The Village Crone*).

FiresideGames.com

KTBG (Kids Table Board Games) makes casual games for serious gamers and serious games for casual gamers. Burnt Island Games focuses on mid-weight games that are easy to learn and reveal surprising depth and richness.

KidsTableBG.com

Blue Orange Games is a leading creator of tabletop games that excite and challenge all ages. The company is driven to inspire families to "unplug" and connect over a game.

BlueOrangeGames.com

Founded in 2009, Stratus Games publishes quality casual and party games like *Eruption*, *Gold Mine*, and *Off Your Rocker*. They are also the creative minds behind Casual Game Revolution and Casual Game Insider.

StratusGames.com

होली Holi
· Festival of Colors ·

Spread Joy and Playful Competition

Ian Birdsall
Marketing & Brand Management
OffDutyNinja, LLC

Get a great start on gaming in the new year with Floodgate Games' latest title, now in a retail store near you! Themed after one of India's most vibrant festivals, *Holi: Festival of Colors* perfectly captures the feeling of spreading color and joy in a delightful area control game for 2-4 players. But can a colorful abstract game stand out amongst the seemingly countless releases each year? Spoiler: Absolutely!

Each game of *Holi* (pronounced Ho-lee) begins with setting up one of the most unique boards you'll see in tabletop games today. This multi-tiered board results from a partnership with GameTrayz. Combine the practical, yet elegant, construction with Vincent Dutrait's beautiful illustrations, and you'll discover one of the more attractive games out there.

Holi: Festival of Colors excels at replicating the feeling of playful competition through tossing colored powder on your friends in a tactical game of friendly rivalry. Each player tries to get their colored tokens on higher levels to score more points than other players, and sometimes directly onto their opponents for a bonus! You can even add up to three rivalry cards from the choice of several to change up some scoring and game rules for maximum replayability.

Turns in *Holi* contain simple yet important choices for each round of play. The required throw action is performed by the active player choosing one of the pattern cards in their hand to determine how the powder tokens will be placed, relative to their player marker. If a token would be placed on another player, it will

score a bonus for a direct hit! Patterns must be positioned so that tokens land in open spaces, creating a puzzle that gets crunchier as the game goes on.

Before or after throwing, a player may move to any unoccupied space on the board. If this space contains a powder token, it is collected and scores end game points for the opponent it belongs to (you can get tricky and collect your own tokens for later use, too). Positioning is important and becomes quite a challenge as the boards fill up with tokens. Luckily, you can climb up to the next level, freeing up space to play. This adds another dimension to the puzzle as tokens will fall if the space below is empty. If a falling token would land on another player, they will collect it instead!

Basic scoring in *Holi* depends on your powder tokens position on each level — typically 1, 2, and 3 points for the respective tiers — and bonus points are awarded from rivalry cards as well as to the player who diligently collected sweets tokens from the lower levels along the way.

For a mid-weight family game that plays in less than an hour, *Holi* is beautifully made and enjoyable for all ages. It's the perfect game to give a bright start to 2021. Bring a bit of color and joy to your game table with **Holi: Festival of Colors** from Floodgate Games! ⊡

2-4 PLAYERS **20-40 MINS** **AGES 13+**

FLOODGATE GAMES

2020 SPIEL.digital

Winter in the Time of the Euro

Justin Spicer

Music Journalist and
Board Game Experimenter

Autumn is a time of change. Leaves turn vibrant oranges and reds, at the whim of a stiff breeze and the cooling temperatures of the Northern hemisphere. Animals grow fat and fluffy as they stuff their jowls with what's left of summer's bountiful harvest as many prepare to hunker down for the oncoming cold of winter.

The same holds true of board gamers. The summer party games begin to become part of the family hunker down, but gamers are always searching for something more. Colder weather means digging into a lengthy list of new and upcoming games in preparation for fattening up game collections to endure the harshness and brittle cold of a looming winter. Games gently labeled "euro" and adjectives such as "light" and "mid" are used to discuss the weight and complexity of a game's mechanics.

This year, the plan of operations has taken a different path. Thanks to a global pandemic, the camaraderie shared in exhibit halls the world over has transitioned to the digital landscape. People are gathering around virtual substitutes to get their social gaming fixes. The desolation of convention centers signal an early winter, yet this year's SPIEL was not short on surefire games meant to warm the bones of gamers who have been in quasi-hibernation for much of the year.

Beyond the list of heavy-hitting designers and publishers that unveil their latest and greatest, SPIEL's 2020 convention did as much as it could to keep the fire burning through digital events with online participants. Last year, SPIEL made a concerted (and successful) effort to include the hundreds of thousands of gamers who cannot make the trip to Essen, Germany, for the yearly gaming bonanza. A bevy of streams hosted by renowned publishers, designers, and content creators helped bring some of the excitement to a global audience.

This year, the digital arm of SPIEL took center stage with mixed results. The official stream from SPIEL's organizers was in German. Last year, SPIEL centered a lot of its contact around multilingual content, largely focused on the German and English languages. This year, SPIEL was happy to casually partner with content creators and leave them to their own devices.

Board Game Geek and The Dice Tower focused on what they do best: talking about and playing games, but they were largely disconnected from the convention coverage itself. Likewise, publishers were hosting videos and playthroughs via YouTube and Twitch, but these efforts were rewarded with mere links via SPIEL's webpage or its virtual exhibition hall. Much like Gen Con Online, SPIEL hosted a hexagonal subsite of publishers where participants could visit websites, order some games, and view content at their leisure.

However, SPIEL's reputation is due to its ability to act as curator and celebrator in equal amounts. This year, SPIEL's digital convention felt flat, much like the world at large. The energy from the German team who helmed SPIEL's coverage was there, but the openness, gaming, demonstrations, and discussions weren't. It felt like a convention pretending to be something greater than it truly is. Again, the weight of what's going on in a world saturated by a pandemic and unease seems to hang over SPIEL's lack of festivities. While it is certainly focused on commerce and people buying the newest games ahead of the holiday season, this year's digital-only event was solely focused on moving what units of big name games were available with little pomp. It was only more evident considering last year SPIEL opened its streams to content creators, publishers, and designers from all over the globe. Despite travel restrictions, the growth of our interconnected world should have presented SPIEL's organizers with the opportunity to interview even more gamers, designers, and content creators across the globe. No one had to physically be in Essen to participate, and yet SPIEL acted as if, without a physical component, the annual convention was more of a burden than a blessing.

Thankfully, the more savvy publishers who tried their hand at streaming stepped up during SPIEL. Between streaming platforms and Discord, games and personalities were shown off in equal measure. After a summer of working out the kinks and Gen Con as a battleground, these publishers made sure to leverage technology the best they could to provide gamers with a chance to get a virtual demo of upcoming titles and to learn a little bit more about the personalities behind them.

After all, SPIEL is about games and gaming. And despite all that's happened this year, SPIEL had a smaller list of releases than in years past, but a strong list from preeminent designers and up-and-coming breakouts alike. The virtual convention goer made do with what was given to them, but they also crave something more. With 2021 shaping up to likely be another year of virtual conventions, SPIEL has some time in its long winter months to go back to the drawing board and remember what makes SPIEL the most hyped board gaming convention in the world.

But fear not! Below are a few of the standout publishers and games to keep you well-ensconced in the warmth that board gaming provides as we continue through the cold winter.

ALLEY CAT GAMES

Tungaru, which had a successful Kickstarter last year, made its retail debut around SPIEL and is now widely available. However, Alley Cat announced two new games, *Kittin* and *Tinderblox*, that show the publisher stretching itself into casual and family-oriented territory.

CAPSTONE GAMES

Known for heavier games, Capstone Games is beginning to explore more casual confines through its international partnerships. *Renature*, the latest abstract family game from Wolfgang Kramer and Michael Keisling, as well as Uwe Rosenberg's *New York Zoo*, pair heavyweight designers with lighter weight designs that still offer a lot of variety due to their puzzly natures. *Curious Cargo* pairs down Ryan Courtney's behemoth *Pipeline* into a two player tile-placement puzzler that offers a similar crunch to the game's origins but does so in an accessible game with a lot of variety.

CZECH GAMES EDITION

CGE went into SPIEL with a lot of buzz over its two titles. *Lost Ruins of Arnak* combines worker placement and deck building elements in an accessible package that oscillates between casual gaming and lightweight Euro fare. The solo game *Under Falling Skies*, which began its life as a print-and-play game, now offers a full campaign game in line with a board game equivalent of Galaga and Space Invaders.

GAME BREWER

Designers Wolfgang Kramer and Michael Kiesling had a great 2020, but *Paris* began its life as a successful Kickstarter. However, the game is now available widely and finds the celebrated pair taking some of their abstract concepts and putting them in a game that may push casual gamers into deeper gaming depths with rewarding consequences.

HABA

HABA always offers a curious mix, as many of their announced games will first grace the European (largely German) market before some make their way to North America. However, a few big and new titles made waves. The first is *The Key*, a series of three deduction games from HABA aimed at younger and more casual audiences. HABA's dexterity stalwart gets a My Very First Game variant with *Rhino Hero Junior*. Similarly, *Clever Keys* and *Critter Cruise* are aimed at children introducing them to memory gaming variants.

2 players

8+

20min

ROYALVISIT™

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HACHETTE

Quetzal is a set collection game where players will roll meeple dice to determine which of their team goes to specific locations to collect artifacts. *Candy Lab* is a simple but clever abstract game, as players play a card with a specific order of items (by color) to take from a conveyor belt of candy. Once removed, these pieces will allow players to perform actions that will benefit them and potentially cause roadblocks for their opponents.

IELLO

IELLO went all in on one big title this year at Essen. *Kitara* is a fantasy-based game where players will leverage cards and area control to try and unite as much territory of an African region as they can to rebuild and sustain an empire.

LUCKY DUCK GAMES

The popular *Chronicles of Crime* series begins its launch into standalone sleuthing content with **Chronicles of Crime: 1400**, which places players into the 15th century. Expansions for hand and resource management game *It's a Wonderful World* are also exciting. *War or Peace* offers campaign content and **Corruption and Ascension** brings new cards with new abilities, while also allowing a sixth player to join in on the fun. **The Court of Miracles** offers bluffing and area control in the guise of being thieves trying to reign over 16th century Paris.
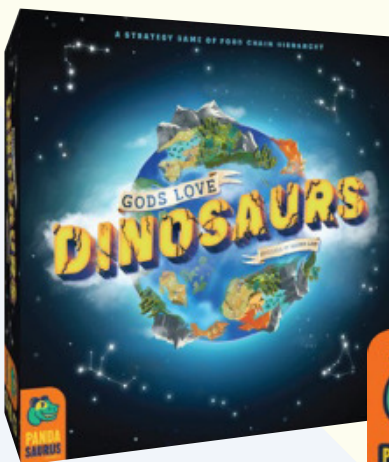
PANDASAURUS GAMES

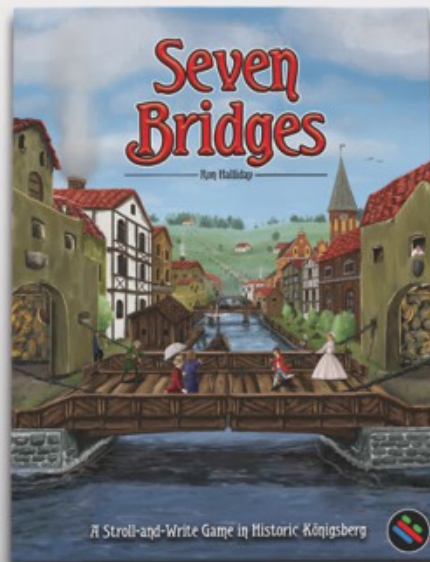The reprint and update to *Tammany Hall* served as a continued reminder of where the publisher came from and where they've gone in a few short years. Also staying close to what they know, Pandasaurus launched *Gods Love Dinosaurs*, which places players in the role of a god who – you guessed it – loves dinosaurs and must work to create a flourishing ecosystem through tile drafting and placement.

RIO GRANDE GAMES

The future of gaming may be tech trees. *Beyond the Sun*, from first-time designer Dennis K. Chan, asks players to complete tech trees to gain benefits and new worker placement spots in this space exploration and colonization game. *Blue Skies* is the latest from Joseph Huber. The game began as an idea to introduce 18xx style gaming with airlines, but has since transformed into a game of managing passengers in one of 30 destinations across the U.S. Players will take over gates at an airport and compete to gain frequent flyers via a deck of cards and the luck of the draw with a bag of green and red cubes. 🎲

From solo adventures to strolling around a historic city with friends, Puzzling Pixel Games has something for you.

Can you escape the living labyrinth? Be careful turning that corner because it may be your last!

Put your deduction skills to the test in the family-friendly card game, Concluzio! Race against your opponents and be the first player to correctly guess your secret clue card.
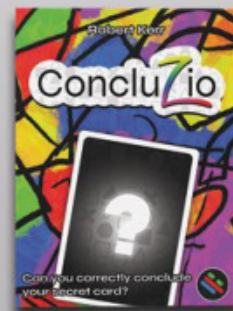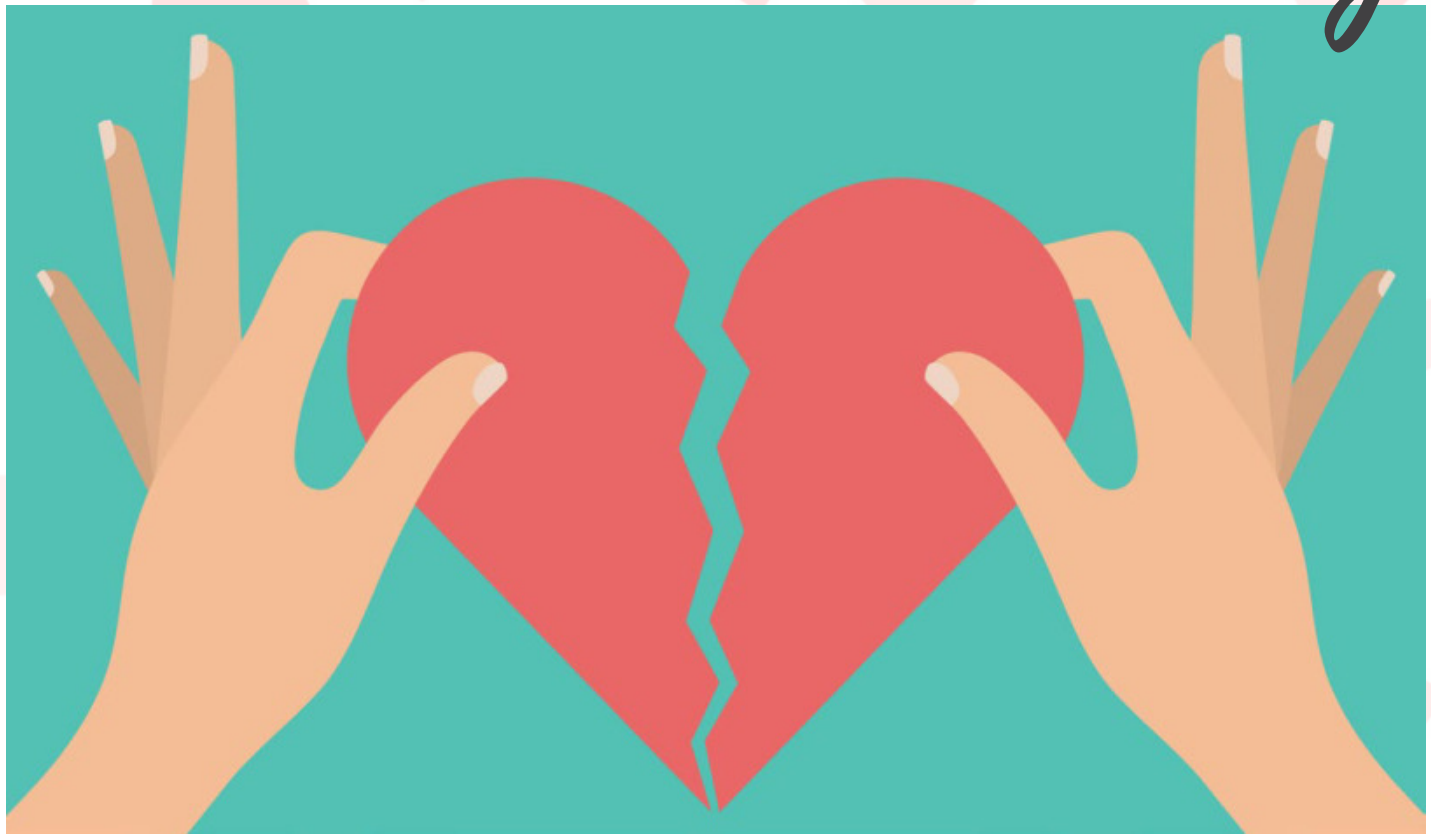
Come explore the European city of Königsberg and learn about the 18th-century puzzle that made its bridges famous!

"Games that fit your life."

Save Valentine's Day

... by Avoiding These Games

Bayard Catron

Game Wizard, Reviewer,
and Event Organizer

Dating can be a difficult process. Traditionally, two people might chit-chat over drinks or dinner, then spend two hours in a darkened theater ignoring each other. This is not the most effective means of getting to know someone. A *shared* activity is a better way to share the *real you* with someone else.

May I suggest a casual evening of board games?

Games reveal our passion, creativity, and how we think. During a game you can see someone unfiltered. You learn their sense of humor or find out if they are a team player or a good sport. Those who play together, stay together. I'm pleased to report the game group I've hosted on Meetup the past 14 years has inspired at least three marriages, with a fourth in the works. Bringing people together to share game experiences is proven to build strong friendships, which can grow into something deeper. A good partner in games could be a good partner in life.

It's not all fun and games, however. There are pitfalls to playing with your significant other. My friend Michelle recounts a tale of her parents' near-divorce over a game of **Monopoly**. Apparently, her father-to-be was winning big because he was sneakily stealing cash out of the bank! Michelle's future mother grabbed the *Monopoly* set, threw it out on the front lawn, and vowed they'd never play again. Many years later, seven-year-old Michelle received a new *Monopoly* set from her grandmother and her mom quietly grumbled, "don't let your dad be the banker." It is a sobering thought that my friend might never have been born because of a game.

For a decade I organized a tongue-in-cheek Anti-Valentine's party known as "Bayard's Blackhearts." It was a chance for singles to whoop it up each year in the sugary season around February 14th. We sought out the games no loving couple would venture near: the offensive, the satirical, the overly-personal. So, I feel I am uniquely qualified to be your guide into the world of games you should avoid if you value your relationship. Note that these games are not bad *per se*, just not recommended for couples. If you're single — or just open-minded — feel free to think of this list of caveats as a shopping list.

Potential relationship-breaking games generally fall into three categories: Inappropriate, I'm Not Having Fun, and Vicious.

OOPS *Inappropriate*

Say what you will about **Cards Against Humanity** — and humanity seems to love or hate it with no middle ground — the R-rated take on *Apples to Apples* has been undeniably successful and spawned an ocean of clones. I have had some good experiences with this type of game, and some so-so ones. After hearing how much fun someone had playing *Cards Against Humanity* with her grandmother, I tried it out with my family, including my seventy-something-year-old mom. It fell flat, not because it was offensive but because my unflappable mom didn't see what the big deal was. As the humor in the game comes from the cards and not the players, there is no subtlety, creativity, or double-entendre. Once you have seen all the cards, the game becomes less interesting. I prefer games where the players fill in the blanks, as there's more opportunity to create memorable moments. Some enjoy the equal-opportunity button-pushing *Cards Against Humanity* provides, while others abhor it. Find out what camp your sweetie is in before breaking out a game with racial, political, and scatological overtones.

Cultural differences could be an issue as well. **Arranged!** is a game that makes a bold statement about female empowerment based on the author's own experience with South Asian cultural norms, such as arranged marriage. Like-minded players will appreciate the message, but it would not go over well in a more traditional gathering. **Overseers**, a card drafting game with suggestive goddess imagery traditional in some Asian folklore, could raise eyebrows in some circles, as does the controversial depiction of less-dressed women in some fantasy adventure settings.

Games about relationships themselves could be hit-or-miss with your better half. **Red Flags**, **Marriage Material**, and **Billionaire Banshee** might highlight negative aspects of your relationship. **Scruples** could reveal shocking differences between you.

A subset of these scandalous games is the genre that makes the players the subject of the debauchery, like the games we all played as children: *Never Have I Ever*, *Truth or Dare*, and *Spin the Bottle*. The problem here is potentially taking the "getting to know you" concept too far. If your date is not comfortable sharing, or hearing about, sexual exploits and the like, this could be awkward. This will depend on personal preference and how long you have been together. As an aside, no one should talk later about anything revealed in these games. Let what happens in the game, stay in the game!

Offensive games put the aggrieved player in the awkward position of suffering in silence or speaking up and ruining everyone's fun time. Know your audience!

MY BAD — I'm Not Having Fun

These four words were famously intoned at one of my events, by the paramour of one of my best gaming friends. There followed a deafening silence. Avoid this kind of game night calamity by matching your games to your players. For example, no one likes to feel dumb, so a trivia game might not be the best choice for everyone. In a game long ago, my girlfriend at the time was bummed out by a question related to Christopher Columbus' famous voyage. Having grown up in another country, she hadn't had "1492" drilled into her brain like the rest of us, and she felt like an outsider. Worse still, I caught myself trying to "Amerisplain" it to her.

Avoid subjecting your honey to overlong or overcomplicated games, or non-preferred themes. Unless your sweetie is a big Cthulhu fan, he will probably not appreciate a Valentine's Day consisting of an eight-hour session of *Arkham Horror* and nothing else. Likewise, dragging your sweetheart into a months-long game campaign like *Gloomhaven* could spell gloom and doom for your relationship.

Overly-competitive games and over-competitive people probably should not mix. There's something to be said for a little healthy competition — after all, a game is on some level a contest — but with your loved one the play should be the thing, not the winning.

Other potential game traps including games with too much luck, unbalanced skill level, games won or lost on the first turn, color-based games, and negotiation.

STILL MAD — Vicious

There is a plethora of "take that" games available on the market that reward or encourage an aggressive, cutthroat style of play. A close cousin of take that is any game that employs bluffing, otherwise known outside the gaming world as lying. Hidden role games like *Secret Hitler* are hugely popular but require lying and betrayal. Games like this can force you to gang up on your significant other and "kill" them in-game, which could land you in the doghouse. At a recent convention, a couple got into a screaming argument and booked separate flights home. One of the combatants was heard to say, "Of course, I was a LANNISTER!!!"

THE NIGHT CAGE

THE NIGHT CAGE

McMahon, Chan, Saunders

How long will your light last?

The Night Cage is a cooperative, horror-themed tile placement game that traps 1-5 lost souls within an otherworldly labyrinth of eternal darkness. Equipped with nothing but dim candles, you must work together to explore the maze and escape.

To win, players must each collect a Key, find a Gate, and escape as a group.

But escape won't be easy. The weak glow of your candle sheds light on only a small area of the maze at a time. As players move, new pathways are revealed while old ones disappear forever into the darkness, creating an ever-changing play space that requires teamwork and collective strategy to navigate.

1-5 PLAYERS **14+** AGES **50** MINUTES

"It's like being in a scary movie"
-Gretchen Settle
Painting Happy
Little Meeples

"This game is fantastic!"
- Jonathan Gilmour

"Flipping tiles has never been so nerve wracking."
-Christian Hoffer
Comicbook.com

SND 1007 $39.99
www.smirkandlaughter.com

Confrontational player-versus-player games like **Magic: The Gathering** are not a good fit for many couples. The whole object of the game is to attack and destroy the other player. Conversely, partnership games like **Spades** and **Bridge** can elicit hurt feelings if you feel criticized by your partner or feel you did not make the correct play.
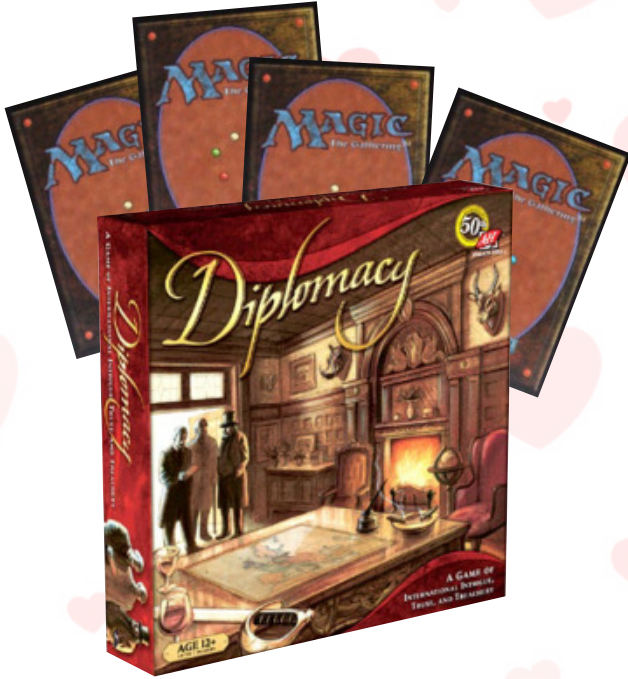
And that brings us to the granddaddy of them all, the world heavyweight champ, friendship-destroyer deluxe: 1959's **Diplomacy**. A strategic game of conflict in Europe in the early 1900s, *Diplomacy* is still widely played to this day and is legendary for requiring misdirection, lies, deceit, subterfuge, and betrayal to finally win. The game has been called a mashup of *Checkers*, *Risk*, *Axis & Allies*, *Chess*, *Poker*, and *Survivor*. *Diplomacy* uses neither dice nor cards, and luck plays no part. Every player's interest in helping another is tied to what the other player can do for them, but ultimately only one player can win, so it progressively becomes a zero-sum game with an inevitable knife in the back for even the most trusted and helpful cohort. It is a most cynical — and, some might say, realistic — depiction of human nature.

The game is a perfect storm of factors to kill any romantic feelings. It's long (five to seven hours), requires exactly seven players, ranges from irritating to maddening, and is epically cutthroat. It presumably should not be played by lovers, unless war in Europe is your thing. But the game produces unforgettable experiences. I checked with some grizzled veterans of the *Diplomacy* hobby and they said a vast majority of couples choose not to play this game together. Those who do must resolve not to take it personally. This also goes for **Twilight Imperium**, which is largely *Diplomacy* in Space.

What to Play

Games are the best way to get to know each other — but many games just won't work with your Valentine. What's a lovelorn gamer to do? Fear not. There are many great alternatives to the games I've listed above.

A great substitute for games like *Never Have I Ever* is **Privacy**, an "after dark" style game with a twist. Players' yes or no answers about "have they ever" are submitted privately, so no one knows for sure who said what. It's an elegant and effective solution.

Wits and Wagers is the most famous example of trivia games for players who hate trivia. The questions are along the lines of "How many dots are on a screen of Pac-Man?" or "What is the world-record number of tennis balls a dog has held in its mouth?" No one can realistically know the exact answers, so it's more a game of guesstimating and betting than knowing trivial things. **America** and **Terra** are other good games of this type.
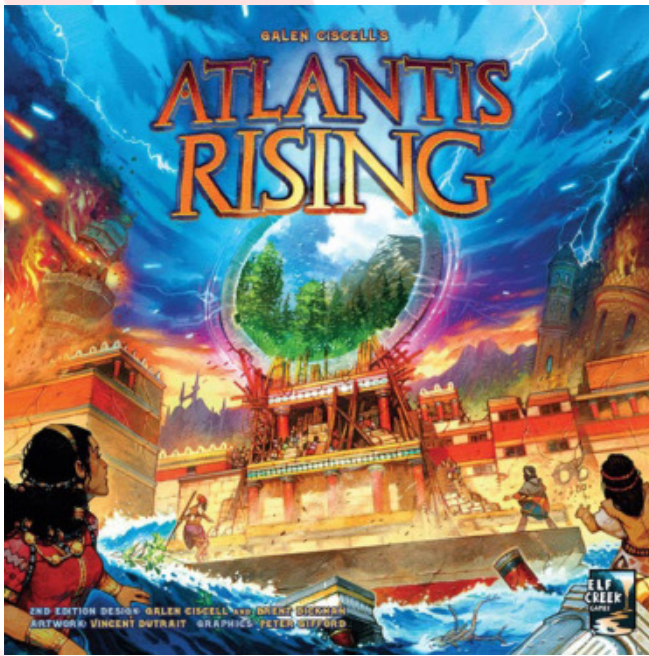
Cooperative games are a good way to avoid brutal competition and build a feeling of camaraderie. All players win or lose together, so teamwork is essential. The **Pandemic** series is probably the best-known example, but games like **The Mind** and **The Crew: The Quest for Planet Nine** are quick, easy, and provide a fascinating challenge: communicating without speaking.

However, you probably want to be able to talk with your sweetie, so check out other options. **Atlantis Rising** (second edition) has a variable player count (plays well with 1 to 7 players), is thematically engaging (players feel that they are citizens of Atlantis rising up and working together to escape the sinking island) and balanced in difficulty. Our last game ended in a dramatic razor's-edge victory, the best outcome for any co-op game.

Happy Valentine's Day, and remember: if a game goes wrong: love the player, hate *the game!* 🎲

RED OUTPOST

30-60 min.

1-4 players

10+

TO MAKE LIFE ON ANOTHER PLANET WORK, THE LIMITED RESOURCES MUST BE SHARED.
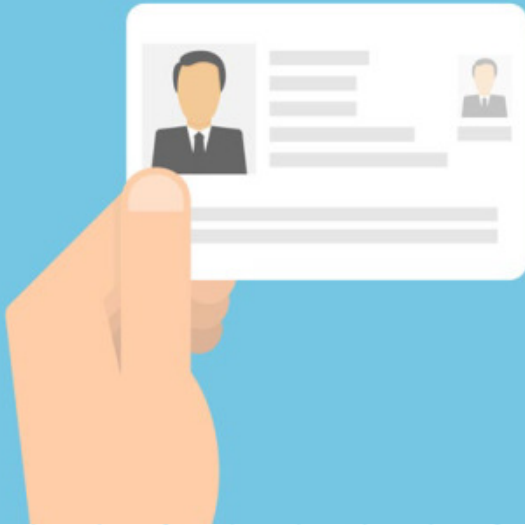
VICTORY, HOWEVER, IS NOT.

IMPERIAL PUBLISHING

LIFESTYLE BOARDGAMES

WINNER KORNI GAME DESIGN CONTEST

SKS-0314

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MSRP: $35

8 Licensed Board Games That Aren't Just Cash Grabs

Dann Albright

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G ames based on books, movies, or TV shows don't have a great track record. In the past, they'd often be designed with more of an eye to visuals than game mechanics, made to make a sale instead of providing an engaging game experience.

But things have changed. Today, there are all kinds of licensed board games that are a blast to play. And they bring players into all sorts of worlds, from Hogwarts, to the Starship Enterprise, to the world of Minecraft.

Here are eight licensed games worth your time:

Disney Villainous
2–6 players | 50 minutes

Prospero Hall, a collaborative game design studio, is behind several of the games on this list and it's likely a name that you'll continue seeing. They've designed many licensed games, from *Bob Ross: Art of Chill* to a Brady Bunch party game. Movie-based games like Home Alone and Groundhog Day make appearances in their catalog, as well.

But *Villainous* is arguably their earliest and biggest hit. It's an asymmetrical game in which each player takes control of a Disney villain. The base game includes Maleficent, Ursula, Jafar, Prince John, the Queen of Hearts, and Captain Hook, though there are several expansions available with new villains.

The fun part of this game is that every villain plays differently. Even though games are relatively short at 45–60 minutes, even long-time

board gamers will find enough challenging decisions for a fun game-playing experience, even though kids ages 10 and up can enjoy this one, as well.

Harry Potter: Hogwarts Battle

2–4 players | 30–60 minutes

Want to find out what Ron and Pigwidgeon would do if they came up against Quirinus Quirrell wielding Fiendfyre in Gringotts? If you play this game a few times, you'll get to decide.

Hogwarts Battle won a Mensa Select award the year after it came out, so you can be confident that you'll need to use your brainpower to master it. This cooperative deckbuilding game lets players dive into the Harry Potter universe as Harry, Hermione, Ron, or Neville.

By building a deck of spells, supporting characters, and items, each player will do their part to fend off users of the dark arts and save Hogwarts. You'll battle your way through seven different campaign stories, each with its own obstacles and villains.

And if you like the idea of Harry Potter deckbuilding but are more competitive, be sure to check out *Harry Potter: Hogwarts Battle – Defence Against the Dark Arts*, a competitive two-player version of this game.

Jaws

2–4 players | 60 minutes

Not too many board games let you play as a shark, which is too bad. Because if *Jaws* is any indication, it's a lot of fun. Three human players face off with the eponymous beast over two very different rounds of play in this hour-long game.

The first phase takes place on Amity Island, where players try to find the shark as it roams the beaches and threatens swimmers. The second takes place on the Orca and sees the players trying to fend off shark attacks and defeat their waterborne enemy. The ship breaks apart, leaving players with less and less room to maneuver.

This is a perfect example of a board game that evokes the feeling of its licensed story. The mystery, tension, and all-out battle for survival of the classic movie is captured perfectly in just sixty minutes. This is a gem of a game that brings an older, deserving movie back into the spotlight.

Star Trek: Catan

3–4 players | 75 minutes

Licensed versions of previously-published board games are an interesting bunch. Sometimes, they're the same game as the original but with some graphic changes. That's mostly the case with *Star Trek: Catan*. Instead of terrain types, you have planets with different resources, there are starships and starbases instead of roads, and settlements.

In fact, there's only one difference in gameplay: *Star Trek: Catan* includes a deck of Support Cards that help you with special abilities. These cards let you break rules or give you bonuses. For example, you may not lose resources when someone rolls a 7, or you could get a discount on building starbases.

This is a minor change from the original *Catan*. But that's what makes this game so great. It doesn't try too hard to add mechanics that don't work out and it isn't quite an exact copy of the original game. It's just a touch of the final frontier.

Horrified

1–5 players | 60 minutes

Classic horror movie monsters, including Frankenstein's monster, the Wolf Man, Dracula, and the Creature from the Black Lagoon are terrorizing your town. In *Horrified*, you must work together with other players to stop them.

The monsters rove around your city, each causing different types of mayhem and requiring different actions to vanquish. You'll need to come up with a strategy for dealing with each before time runs out.

The wide variety of monsters and different combinations that you can play with give this game a lot of replay value. The mechanics are quite simple, making this an especially easy game to pick up. Whether you're a horror movie buff or not, defeating the monsters is a satisfying victory; sending Dracula back to his coffin is always fun.

Minecraft: Builders & Biomes

2–4 players | 30–60 minutes

Board games based on video games aren't new, but modern open-world exploration games like Minecraft seem like they might be difficult to translate into a board game where players need to have a definite goal.

However, *Builders & Biomes* hits the right balance between channeling its source material and creating an engaging board game. Players collect blocks to build structures, find weapons, and fend off mobs. Defeating mobs gives you bonuses like end-game scoring points or immediate actions.

To earn the most points, you'll need to keep in mind the game's three scoring rounds, which take different factors into account. Plan your biomes, materials, and structures to tally the highest score and you'll win out in the end.

Bob Ross: Art of Chill

2–4 players | 30 minutes

Doesn't the title of this game alone make you a bit more relaxed? This game is all about chill (there's a card that says "Do NOT move Bob forward, he's just chilling"). You literally win the game by reaching maximum chill.

After 2020, we all need to chill out a bit — and if board games can help with that, I'm all for it. You'll collect paint and painting tools to finish your painting card before Bob and your opponents finish their card. It's all quite straightforward.

That's exactly what we need right now: a game with a familiar face that promotes relaxation. You get to roll dice, draft cards, and hunt for combos. It's just about everything you love in a competitive board game that emphasizes not scoring points, but maximizing chill.

UNDER FALLING SKIES

TAKE CHARGE OF DEFENDING CITIES OF EARTH FROM AN ALIEN INVASION!

Under Falling Skies is a solo game with a multi-mission campaign where all your actions are powered by an innovative dice placement mechanic. Expand your underground base, shoot down enemy ships, research their weaknesses, and complete your mission before your base is destroyed!

You will get your money's worth. You're gonna play a lot of it!

Zee Garcia of The Dice Tower

cge.as/ufsi

AGE: 12 +

PLAYERS: 1 +

TIME: 20–40 MIN

LOST RUINS OF ARNAK

MÍN & ELWEN

cge.as/ari

EXPLORE JUNGLES, FIND ARTIFACTS, AND DISCOVER THE LOST RUINS OF ARNAK!

Players lead rival expeditions to a newly discovered island. Through a unique combination of worker placement and deckbuilding, each expedition attempts to uncover the lost island's secrets.

This game's fantastic. It is a breath of fresh air in both worker placement and resource management... and deckbuilding and card draft – it's everything really cool!

Dan King of Game Boy Geek

AGE: 12 +

PLAYERS: 1–4

TIME: 30/ MIN

CGE
Czech Games Edition

Disney Hocus Pocus: The Game

2-6 players | 30 minutes

Disney's Hocus Pocus is a classic movie about witches. In the 1993 movie, a teen accidentally resurrects three witches in Salem, Massachusetts by lighting the Black Flame Candle (okay, this one's fairly dark for a Disney movie — things were different in the early 90s).

This card game sees players trying to foil the witches' plans by ruining the potion that they're brewing. You'll work together with other players by asking them what's in their hand — though your questions are limited — and trying to play cards that have the same color or object depicted on them.

But things get a bit complicated with the witches' spells, and limited communication options, which mess up your plans. With room for up to six players, this is a good one for the whole family.

License to Thrill

Licensed games can still be nerve-racking. There are some bad licensed games that are straight cash grabs with little or no game substance.

But that's not true of every licensed game. Some are a blast to play. And several of these games, because of their widely-popular source material, are easy to find and relatively cheap to buy.

What do you have to lose?

A COMPLETE GAME FOR YOU TO PLAY & ENJOY!
COURTESY OF: PNP ARCADE

CGi +PNP

Turbo Drift

Designed by Rob Cramer
Art by Mark Boardman
ButtonShyGames.com

button shy

ROB CRAMER'S
TURBO DRIFT

2 PLAYER SAMPLE

BOOST

If a Path Card you place overlaps a Turbo icon on a Barrier Card, you may remove the Boost Card from the back of the Path Cards already played and place it as the next Path Card. Any unplayed Path Cards are then played in front of the Boost Card.

Note: If you overlap any Turbo icons with the Boost Card or while reversing (see below), they are ignored.

END OF TURN

Once all legal Path Cards have been played, flip your car over and place it on the last Path Card line.

Note: *The First Player Card and each Car Card has a blank side and a steering wheel side. This will show which cars have already been played each Round.*

Flip over the Path Cards you took from the grid and return them to the grid in any order you want, making sure to form a 2x3 grid. Pass the Boost Card to the next player clockwise to end your turn. Play continues to the next player clockwise.

END OF ROUND

Once all players have taken their turn (as noted by the ⊙ icons on the Car Cards), the player with the First Player Card will start the next round. Play will continue clockwise.

REVERSE

To get out of sticky situations, instead of placing the Boost Card behind your Car before driving, you may reverse by placing your first Path Card facing backwards from the Car, connecting the tire tracks that run off the edge of the Cards (NOTE: you cannot activate *Turbo* 🔥 *icons while reversing*). Then remove the Car from in front of the Path Card and continue your turn. Any other Path Cards played on your turn will be placed on the line facing away from the normal placement, overlapping the tire tracks.

CRASH

If a Path Card or Car Card overlaps another Car or Barrier on a Barrier Card, it cannot be played. Place your car on the last Path Card that doesn't make it overlap another car or Barrier. It is possible to not move at all on a turn because of a crash. Your turn is now over.

NITRO

Once per game, when picking Path Cards, you can choose all 6 Path Cards. Shuffle them and use them to drive.

After legally placing a card, before looking at the next card to play, you can choose to stop. But if any Path Cards or your car hits a Barrier or another Car, your car explodes and you are out of the game. Use Nitro wisely. Nitro can only be used once per game.

END OF GAME / WINNER

The first player to overlap the Finish Line Card with their Car or a Path Card wins immediately. If a Path Card or car overlaps both the Finish Line Card and another Car or Barrier, it does not count as a victory. Treat this as a normal crash and continue playing.

Design: Rob Cramer
Art: Mark Boardman

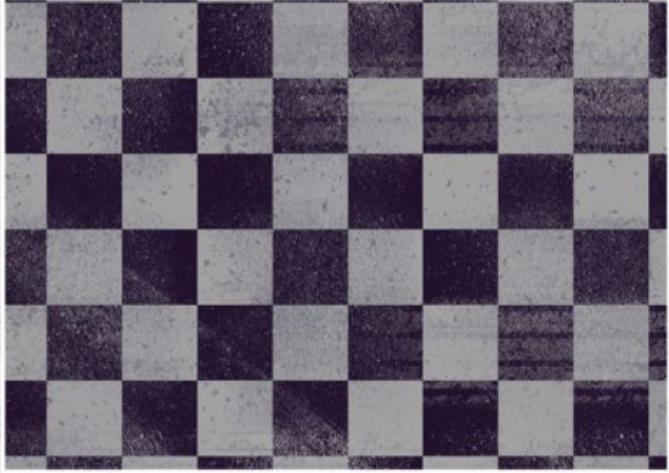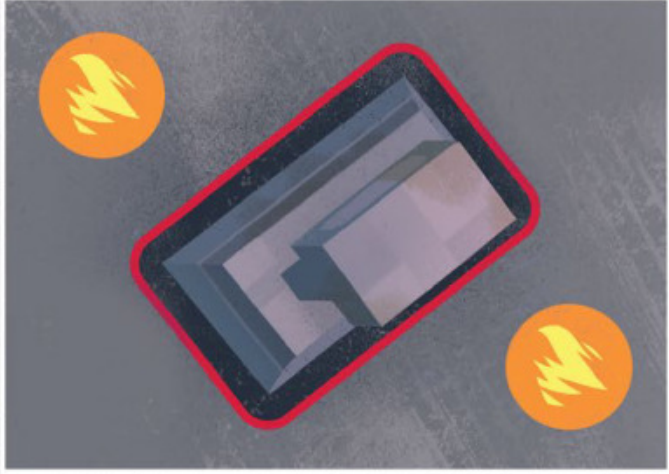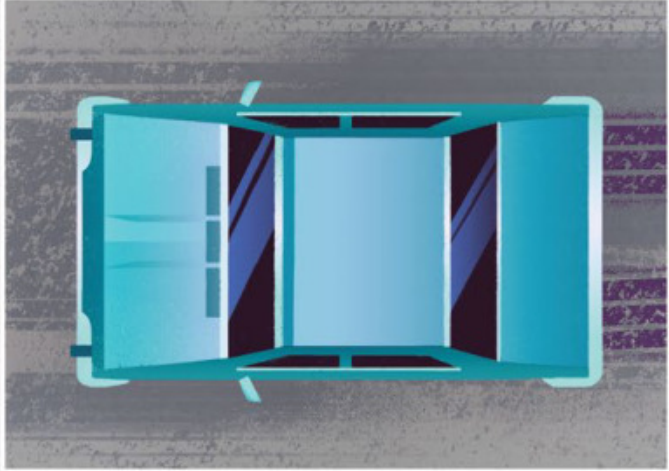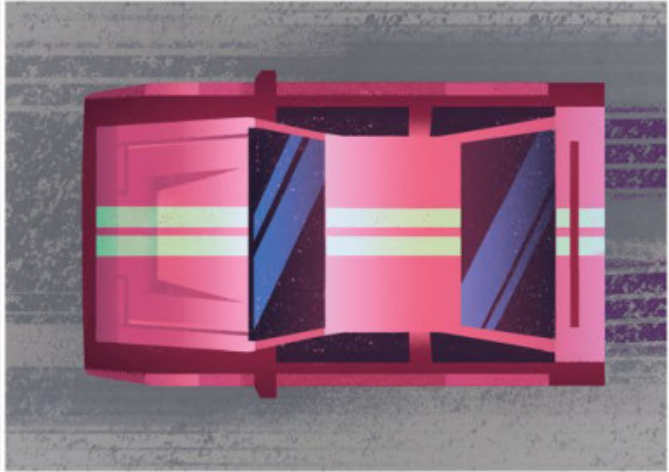Rules FAQ at buttonshygames.com

button shy

2 PLAYERS   AGES 8+

Early 1980. Japanese mountain pass. Cars of all shapes and sizes are zipping around the corners faster than you have ever seen. And now it's your turn behind the wheel to drift, boost and nitro your way to the finish line.

COMPONENTS

13 cards: Made up of 6 Path Cards, 2 Barrier Cards, 2 Car Cards, 1 Finish Line Card, 1 Boost Card (flames), 1 First Player Card (traffic light)

OBJECT

Players take turns choosing Path Cards and moving their cards toward the Finish Line Card, taking advantage of Turbo icons while avoiding the barriers on the same cards. The first player to reach the Finish Line Card with their Car Card or Path Card wins.

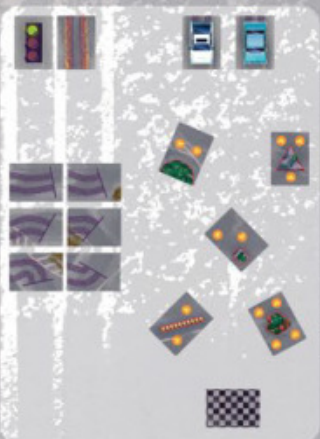### SETUP

A 3'x3' area is recommended.

Place the Finish Line Card at one end of the course. Then shuffle the Barrier Cards and place them on the table in any arrangement you wish.

GAMEPLAY

The player that most recently won a race goes first.

Each round, players will take turns choosing up to 3 Path Cards from the grid and using those cards to drive through the course.

Starting with the first player and going clockwise, players choose a Car Card and place their card (with the ⊕ icon face down) on an imaginary starting line on the side of the course opposite of the Finish Line card.

Shuffle and place the 6 Path Cards in a 2x3 grid. Give the Boost card and the First Player Card (⊕ side face down) to the first player.

Each round starts with the player with the First Player Card in front of them and continues clockwise, ending when all players have taken a turn picking Path Cards and driving.

TURN

On your turn, choose Path Cards, then Drive.
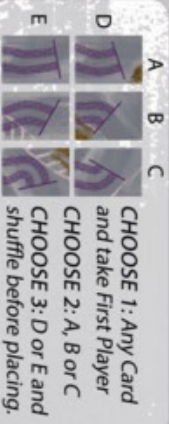
CHOOSE PATH CARDS

You can choose 1, 2, or 3 from the 2x3 grid.

1 CARD: You may take any one card from the grid. Also, take the First Player Card and place it in front of any player you choose, including yourself.

2 CARDS: You must take a column of 2 cards from the available three rows.

**3 CARDS:** You must take a row of 3 cards from the available two rows. You must shuffle these before placing them.

NOTE: You cannot flip cards over when choosing and you cannot "test" how path cards will move you before you take them.

A ___ B ___ C

D CHOOSE 1: Any Card and take First Player

CHOOSE 2: A, B or C

E CHOOSE 3: D or E and shuffle before placing.

DRIVE

Place the Boost Card directly behind your Car, then remove your Car from the course.

Place your first Path Card directly in front of the Boost Card, connecting the tire tracks that run off the edge of the Boost Card. When placing another Path Card, place it on the line of the previously placed Path Card.
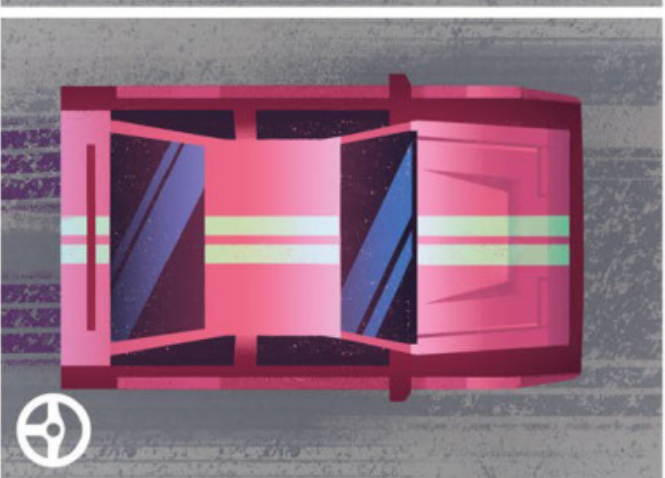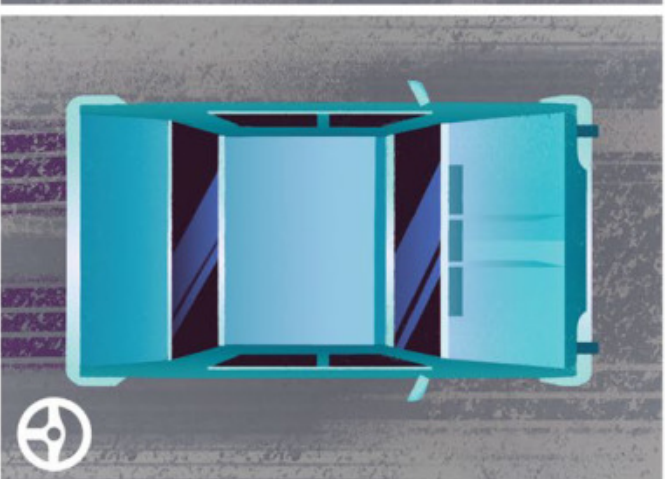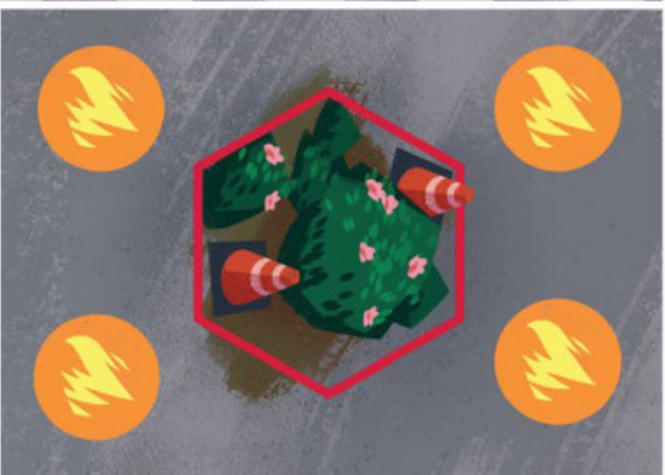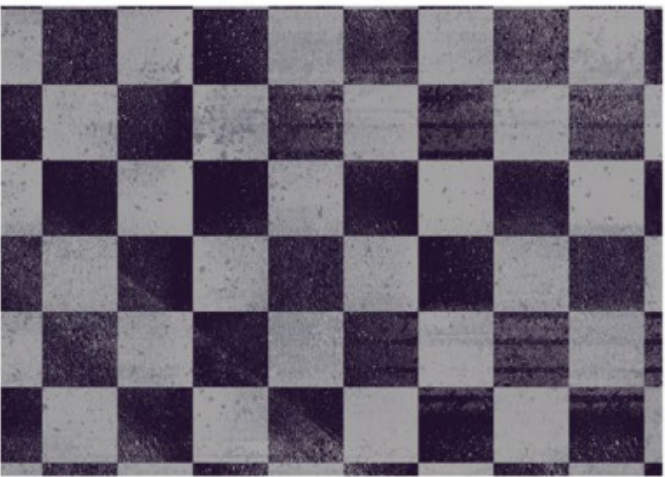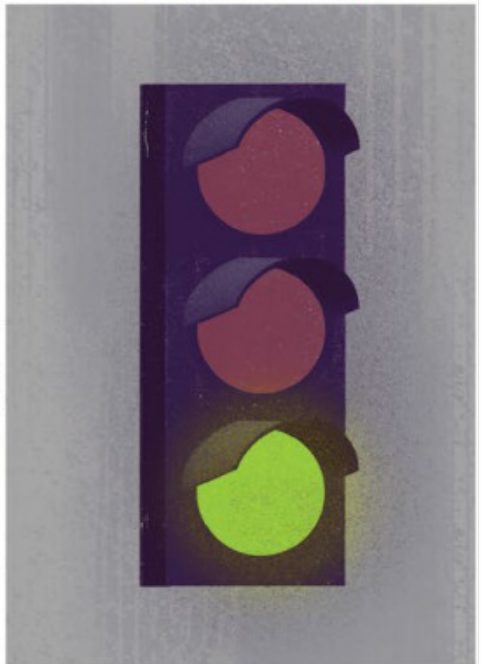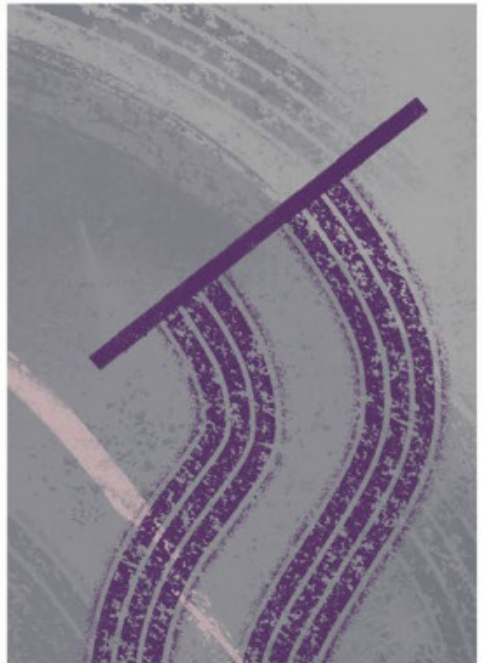
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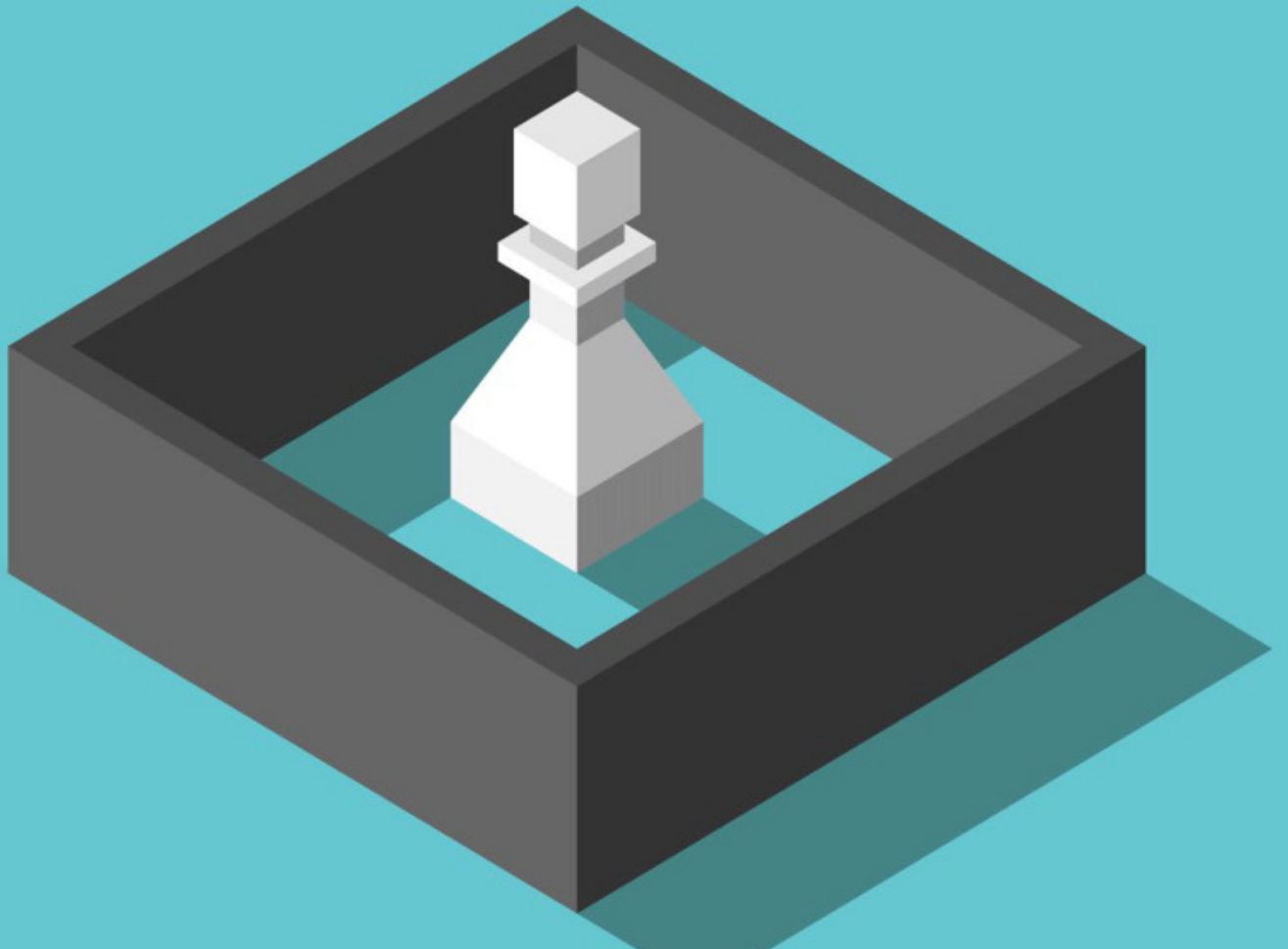
Discovering Solo Play in an Empty Game Café
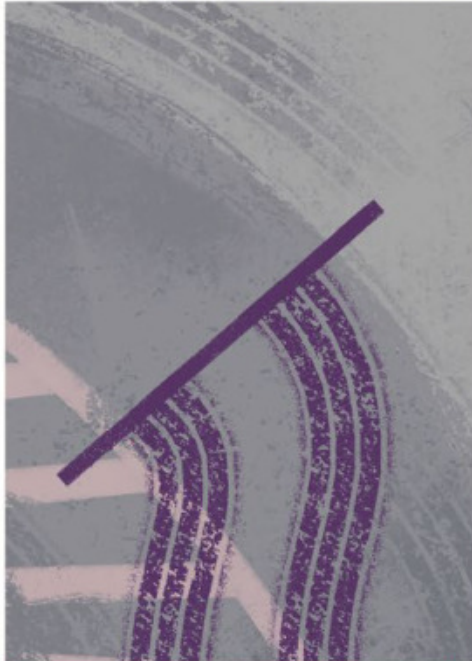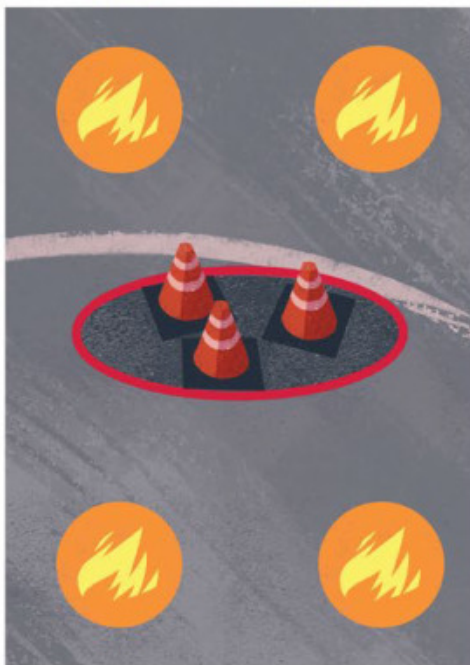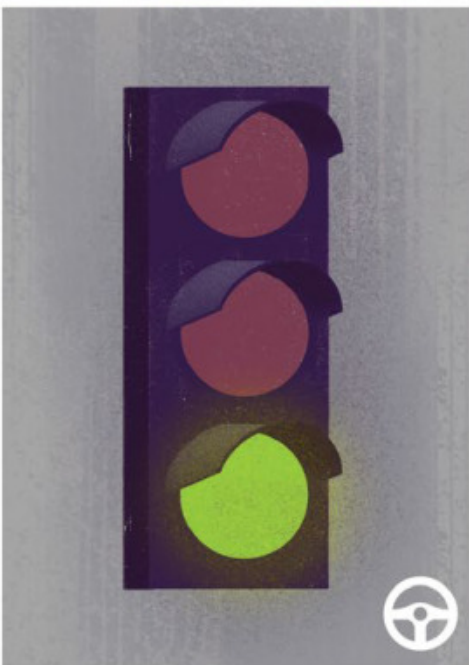
Kevin Hadley

Co-Owner of The Meeple's
Board Game Cafe

In a time of isolation, like the lockdowns of 2020, the modern board game hobby has a weird identity. On one hand, families are desperately looking for activities for their kids to engage in beyond video streaming and digital media; on the other hand, gamers may be left with either no one to play with or restricted to simpler "family-friendly" games. As I sat by myself in front of my board game library, I decided to find solace in the back of the rulebook; the place where the rules for solo mode are typically found.

The Meeple's Board Game Café in Gilbert, Arizona, seeks to provide fun, food, and fellowship to its customers.

Spreading the Love of Gaming

As a board game café owner, my family and I were hit especially hard due to the lockdowns. We opened The Meeple's Café in Gilbert, Arizona, during the summer of 2019 with an unstoppable motivation to bring a hobby we loved to others. Our mission from conception was to provide fun, food, and fellowship. Unfortunately, all three became extremely difficult to fulfill in 2020.

One of our niche services is renting out board games, like video stores used to do for DVDs and VHS tapes. Our rentals picked up quite a bit for families who were looking for a digital alternative, but I felt ill-equipped to offer a solution to those casual and serious gamers who needed something beyond family-friendly games. Applying my problem solving, I was reminded of the solo mode of one of my favorite games,

Wingspan by Elizabeth Hargrave. While we could only offer food for takeout and fellowship was strictly forbidden during the lockdown, I had to investigate if solo games were a solution to the first third of our mission: fun. Could I recommend games based on their solo modes to our more hardcore customers?

Party of One

The solo version of *Wingspan* not only has its own rulebook in the box, but it has its own title: Automa. The Stonemaier game *Viticulture*, by Jamey Stegmaier and Alan Stone, first introduced a solo mode by the Automa factory. Automa is a loose Italian translation for "robot", so it represents the idea of having a robotic opponent to play against for solo players. Typically, the Automa system is a deck of cards dictating what the robot player does, while trying to mimic the moves of a real-world opponent. The Automa follows its

own rules, including how points are generated as dictated by a pre-programmed logic. In *Wingspan*, bird cards and food resources are accumulated similar to a human opponent to set what is (and is not) available to you as the solo player. In addition, they are earning victory points at an unpredictable rate, giving the player a sense of excitement and uncertainty towards the idea of "am I winning?" The Automa's victory points constantly progress while their actions influence available choices for the human player.
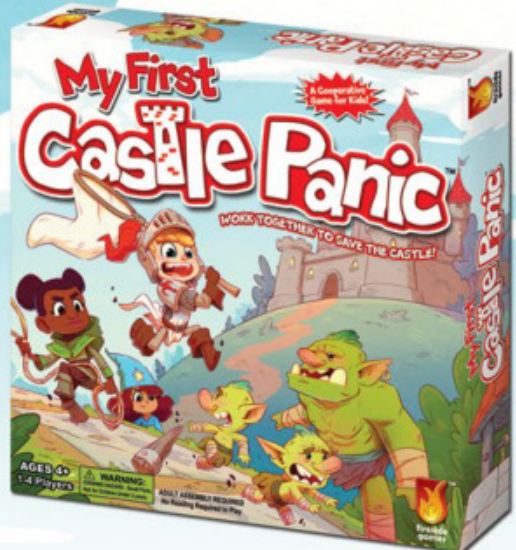
My assessment was that I did enjoy myself. Being diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), I have found gaming as a perfect outlet. Mainly, games allow someone with ASD to overcome some of their limitation (e.g., trouble socializing) by leveraging the strengths of being on the spectrum (e.g., hyper-focus and a set of rigid rules). As a kid, I did not grow up playing *Monopoly* and *Uno*. I played card games like *Pinochle* and *Rummy*, and I was taught many versions of solitaire. While the Automa system does not allow for socialization, it does let me engage my problem-solving mind for an enjoyable experience like when my dad taught me solitaire.

Experience is the very core of the modern board game hobby. Whether the experience invokes strategy and problem-solving, forces adaptability and resourcefulness, or provides for social interaction and engagement does not matter. All experiences from playing a game is why I play. While I attempt to balance the different experiences from game to game, a pandemic prevents the mission of "fellowship" but not the mission of "fun." While I missed the fellowship aspect of other players, like when a player re-rolls the food dice in *Wingspan*, experiences like adaptability and strategy were still there to create fun for my ASD brain.

Categorizing Fun

After playing *Wingspan* (and other Automa games) I started recommending these to the café's more hardcore gamers. Unfortunately, not every game comes with an Automa, but other games in the library have a solo mode. As such, I tackled the task of categorizing the solo version of these games.

Within the café's library, I found that two categories of games were commonly equipped with a solo mode: cooperative play (co-op) and roll-and-write. The solo rules for each co-op game essentially say the same thing: play as two characters alternatively. While you sacrifice the collaborative nature of co-op games, you do not sacrifice the experience of overcoming adversity and fighting against the game. The strategies, the coordination, and unpredictability are still present even if you are the sole coordinator. For example, by playing two heroes in *Sentinels of the Multiverse* from Greater Than Games, you can figure out how to utilize the strength of both heroes to overcome the supervillain.

However, some co-ops truly depend upon separate minds, like *Hanabi*, where you use creative communication skills to coordinate a fireworks show with other players.

Roll-and-write games have been around for a long while (e.g., *Yahtzee*) but have experienced a renaissance with actions like shared rolling. As a result, the game goes beyond the luck of good rolls to "what is the best way to use my rolls?" This approach mimics what is seen in perfect information games, but because of the random nature, there is no universal key to get a high score. Because of this, I honestly cannot think of a modern roll-and-write without a solo mode included.

In organizing solo games, I noticed two publishers who focus on including solo rules in their games. The first were games with the Automa system, mainly titles coming from Stonemaier Games. The other are games from Gamelyn Games, particularly through their *Tiny Epic* series (designed by Scott Almes), where each hosts a solo mode in the rules.

The co-ops played as previously described, while their others were hit-and-miss with respect to being successful as a solo game. The exception was *Tiny Epic Tactics* because it introduced a wholly new play setting and style for the host game as opposed to programming a robot player like the Automa system. In other words, *Tiny Epic Tactics* brought an experience in solo play that was not remotely found in the competitive multi-player mode.

Necessity is the Mother Duck of Invention

As I categorized, I looked longingly at other games I loved, thinking "Could those be played solo?" I decided to take a crack at adapting a game into a solo version. Obviously, I could play multiple players separately (I do this to learn the nuances of the rules, but it is not fun). Rather, I re-examined the solo trends in roll-and-writes and co-ops for a solution — any game where success depends upon the choices in a game, but those choices have minimal impact on the choices of others and could be adapted to a solo play style. For example, a deck-builder like *Dominion* could be played solo if attack cards are not used. By using half of the cards in each supply, the challenge can be to get the highest score within 20 turns. The randomness of the cards combined with the good choices of deck building provide a satisfying experience and a sense of accomplishment when you get the fourth province within 16 turns versus 20 turns.

One mechanism surprised me with how appropriately it could be converted into a solo mode: programmed movement. In hindsight, because it is programmed, it provides for a viable opponent, similar to the Automa system. Specifically, *Tiny Epic Mechs* provides a deck with pre-programmed, albeit random, movements and set logic on how to address other decisions by the non-human players.

As such, I challenged myself to quickly adapt one of my favorite programmed movement games to a solo version. In *Duck! Duck! Go!* from APE Games, players use cards to guide their rubber ducky from their start position to three separate buoys, and finally to the drain. While simple, this game is a programmed movement game I can play with my kids, so I figured it was a good test of my efforts to make a viable solo variant.

First, the deck must be set up for a more equal distribution of certain movement cards. I sorted the cards in numerical order, dealt one at a time to myself followed by two ghost players, and subsequently shuffled the three piles. As a human player, my rules did not change. Each ghost player would draw two cards and choose the one that put them closest to an unclaimed buoy. After the player pile was exhausted, the three separate decks were individually reshuffled and rotated to the left, thus giving the player and the non-humans access to new cards. With this simple logic, the game provided the excitement of racing to the buoys and fighting with other ducks even without other humans dictating what happens. In addition, it added the meta-analysis of attempting to predict where the ghosts would go to best prevent my ducky from running into theirs.

With a little effort and borrowing from other solo game designs, I was able to build a solo version of a game myself. Does it replace the experience of playing with other people? Of course not! However, it satisfies those itches I get from not playing games, like problem solving through adaptability. In addition, the case of meta-analyzing the "opponents" provided a new level of strategy to challenge myself with. While solo play will rarely improve a game beyond its core design, it does provide an opportunity to still enjoy the games in your library.

Unlocking the Future

As I sit in an empty café reflecting on our first year, I hope our customers will succeed in finding the fun of solo play if they cannot play with others. Gamers enjoy being out, having fun, and enjoying fellowship all while being safe at the same time. In these moments of forced isolation, you can keep your brain engaged and have fun with the solo versions of modern board games. We hope reconnections with other players by way of gaming cafés can happen when the time is right — then we can fully realize The Meeple's Café's mission of fun, food, and fellowship.

The Hadley family: Kevin and his wife Darcy with their two daughters, Aurora (older) and Penny (younger)

Hidden Role:
Ted Alspach and the Emergence of Bezier Games

Jesse Tannous
Writer, Gamer, Editor, and
Professional Nerd

béziergames
THE NEW CLASSICS

At 52 years-old, creator and CEO of Bezier Games Ted Alspach admits that he has been a gamer and has been designing games all his life. Yet, most of his early designs he considers to be "junk."

"It was really playing a lot of Euro games in the early 2000s that got me thinking about making these types of games," Alspach said.

The types of games Alspach wanted to publish include the likes of *Ultimate Werewolf*, *Silver*, *Suburbia*, and *Castles of Mad King Ludwig*.

Alspach previously worked with Adobe as a Product Manager for the Creative Suite software and was very comfortable using graphics tools like Illustrator and InDesign. In fact, he is considered one of the world's leading experts on Illustrator, and he put these skills to good use. He spent much of his time using his graphic design expertise to make player aids for various games, like a specialized board for the game *Liar's Dice*.

Season of the Werewolf

Around this time, Alspach was playing a lot of *Werewolf* with friends and family and had access to a high-quality, commercial-grade graphic arts printer, which he would use to print some custom-made decks with his personalized house rules for the game. Eventually, after having printed more than 20 decks with their own boxes and rule sheets, Alspach and his family decided to call it *Ultimate Werewolf*. The project was mostly just a friend and family blueprint at the time. But by the mid-2000s he decided to post his creation for sale online and after several months sold more than 800 copies.

Alspach was quickly getting exhausted fulfilling these orders himself by hand-cutting each deck and assembling them — deciding instead to order a small print run of about 2,000 copies. He sold through them in less than a year, and that's when the distributors began to pay attention. "*Werewolf* just kept selling... constantly," Alspach said.

"I was [working on] some expansions for *Age of Steam*, then I went, 'wait a minute, I'm actually publishing games.' I already had a company for a long time called Bezier, so I just called it Bezier Games, again not thinking long term but just thinking short term," Alspach explains.

Ultimate Werewolf first came out in 2005, and every year after it kept selling more copies than the previous year. This helped Alspach fund everything else he was publishing.

Do You Feel Lucky?

Around 2012 he ended up publishing *Suburbia,* which became successful in the strategy game market. A few years later, he introduced *One Night Ultimate Werewolf*, which ended up eclipsing *Ultimate Werewolf* sales over time.

Alspach viewed his game publication as a "fun, side thing" — which was in sync with how his wife, Antonia, felt because they both loved to play games and it was their spare time activity. "We were definitely of the opinion that this was awesome, we can write off our game hobby and traveling to conventions as a business expense because we were there selling games, and for us that was kind of the be-all-end-all. Once the games started doing well enough, we both realized we might be able to do this instead of our other jobs."

Within a few years, the husband-and-wife team were creating and publishing full-time. Bezier Games now has 10 full-time employees and many contractors. The business has been growing for the past six years.

Alspach downplays his success and gives credit to luck for much of Bezier's growth. But many would argue with that assertion, since Bezier's titles are increasingly in demand. Bezier Games, known for their creativity and team play, has a reputation that stands on its own. "My wife and I often have a conversation that if you had asked us 10 years ago if we'd be doing this full-time we'd have said 'Absolutely not, there's no way we'd be able to support ourselves publishing games,' but it turns out you can. Still, there was a healthy dose of luck and timing," Alspach demurs.

The Current Agenda

Alspach enjoys the excitement of game conventions and trade shows. He and his wife have always enjoyed seeing the new games and the people who love gamer interests, especially at the conventions and in person. "At Gen Con I love being at the booth and showing off our games, but at the same time I want to walk around and see all the new stuff coming out. I go on Board Game Geek (BGG) and mark off all the stuff I am excited about, just like other people do. For us it is just so nice to work in this industry that we love," Alspach said.

However, COVID-19 has put a halt to the in-person mingling, as well as showcasing at conventions and trade shows. Ted, Antonia, and the Bezier Games employees are doing their best to contend with COVID-19 and the impact it has had on the business.

"The amount of visibility games have, or just to find out information about games, is very difficult right now. A very small percentage of gamers go to a site like BGG for information, so conventions are how a lot of people find out about games — or by going to their local shop," Alspach explains.

Alspach has personally played several new and very promising games that are creative and fun. Unfortunately, a lot of people haven't heard of them because of the lack of interaction and the amount of energy it takes to get the same sort of buzz going that happens naturally at conventions.

"Gaming tends to be a social thing, and it's just not happening as much," begins Alspach. "Obviously, a pandemic is horrible in a myriad of other ways, but specifically for gaming 2020 is kind of a lost year. We are lucky because we have a marketing budget, we have a name that is a bit more well-known, which will help our games still get some attention, but small developers who have an awesome game are going to have a really difficult time getting noticed."

Focusing on some of the exciting new games out there, Alspach feels some of these games will quickly be propelled into the mainstream of gaming, along with some of his own game creation premiers.

"I just finished the Kickstarter for *Ultimate Werewolf Extreme*, which is something I've been wanting to do for quite a while. Stepping back and looking at the *Ultimate Werewolf* line and how it has evolved, and really refocusing on the core aspects of it and fixing some of the issues I've seen over time. We have hired an amazing artist with all new upgraded art.

We have simplified some of the rules, trying to get rid of some of the weird inconsistencies, [and] we've set up a lot of 'pro' type things for players who are experienced with *Werewolf* and who want to take it to the next level," describes Alspach.

Alspach is also looking forward to the reaction from fans on his continuation of the Bezier Games *Silver* series. *Silver Dagger* is the fourth game in the *Silver* series, and while they are all stand-alone, they can also be combined to be played in different ways.

Ultimate Comeback

Social distancing recommendations in the COVID-19 pandemic have interrupted peoples' plans and mobility, but the good news is that games have always been a mainstay social activity for families and pals to engage in, even remotely. As it turns out, the Alspachs and Bezier have created a line-up of games that allow families to find a bit of escape that also allows players to interact despite social distance.

This added resiliency has allowed Bezier to not only weather this unusual storm, but to come back stronger than ever when life goes back to normal.

bézier games
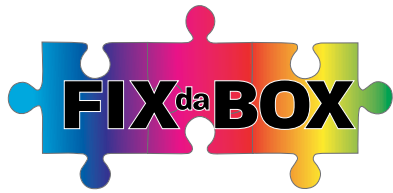
THE NEW CLASSICS

In the first 'flick-and-write' game, explore the beauty of the desert as you flick discs and compete in four different areas.

Naomi Laeuchli
Game Reviewer and
Casual Game Groupie

Each player takes five discs in their player color with values of one through five. You also take a score sheet, which has four different scoring areas corresponding to the four areas on the game board. Every round, you flick two discs each turn from your corner of the board. On your third turn, you flick your final disc. Your disc can knock an opponent's disc out of the way. If your disc lands in the center dip, you remove it and choose which area it counts towards. Each disc's final location, after all flicking is done, is where it will score. After flicking each round, players move to the writing phase.

In the cliff-dweller ruins, you are marking off groups of blocks. You calculate the combined value of all your discs in that area and then mark off that many blocks. Players are racing to complete specific groups, with the first player to do so scoring an extra bonus.

In the canyon zone, the value of your disc determines the size and configuration of blocks you mark off. The configurations must be adjacent to a previously marked one. There are three types of cacti scattered across the blocks. The more that get marked off, the more points they'll be worth at the end of the game.

The creek bed shows various paths. The value of your discs is how many spaces you must travel. Starting at a space you ended at previously, or at a crossroads you passed, you mark off the correct number of spaces and then circle where you stopped. You earn points equal to the number that is circled.

The mudcracks consist of various interconnected nodes, with each connection point showing a number. You total up the value of your discs in that zone and may mark off connected nodes whose combined numbers equal or are less than that value. You earn points by marking off all three nodes that surround different cacti (with different types being worth different amounts of points).

At the end of each round you rotate the board so that players will be flicking from different corners. After a set number of rounds, players add up their scores from each zone.

Sonora is a thematically and aesthetically lovely game that feels like you're competing in four separate mini-games. Teaching takes a little extra time with explaining each zone, but the final result is well worth that time. The range in scoring mechanics leads to interesting choices, while the flicking adds a challenging dexterity layer to the gameplay as well as player interaction as you knock each other around the board.

Sonora
Designed by Rob Newton

1-4 PLAYERS	30-45 MINS	AGES 10+	$30 MSRP

LUCK ———————————— STRATEGY

INTERACTIVE ———————————— INDEPENDENT

Winner of the 2020 Kennerspiel des Jahres, *The Crew: The Quest for Planet Nine* is a cooperative trick-taking card game that will send you on an epic space adventure spread out across fifty missions.

KOSMOS

Played with a deck of forty cards, you start by picking the mission you will be playing and then dealing the cards evenly to all players. The cards come in four different colors (with each color representing a suit) with cards valued one through nine, plus the rocket suit with values one through four. Whoever has the four of rockets is the commander and goes first, playing the first card. Standard trick-taking rules apply: whoever won the previous trick plays any card, and then the other players follow the suit of that card if possible. If they can't, they may play any card. Highest card of the initial suit wins, with rockets acting as trumps, winning the trick regardless of the suit. All the cards are then picked up and stacked face-down in front of the player who won them.

The Crew differs from other trick-taking card games by being cooperative. Each mission has a set number of requirements in order to win the game. These are often randomized to some degree. The task deck will be shuffled, and a certain number of cards dealt from it. These contain a copy of every card in the main deck. Players usually take turns selecting the dealt task cards and placing them in front of themselves. In order to complete the mission you must win the tricks that contain the cards that match your task cards. If another player accidentally wins your card, players immediately lose the mission and must try again. Missions may also require tasks to be completed in a certain order or for one player not to win any tricks.

Players may not talk about their cards. However, everyone starts each mission with one communication token. You may place one of your cards face-up in front of yourself and then place your token at the top to indicate it is your highest card in that suit, at the bottom to indicate it is the lowest, or in the middle to indicate it is the only one.

The missions in the booklet get progressively harder as you play through. While they tell an entire story that is satisfying to play to completion, it's also a game you can easily dip in and out of. *The Crew* is an original and unusual combination of mechanics. On the one hand, the trick-taking makes it extremely accessible for new players, while the cooperative twist makes it something truly unique and often challenging.

Kennerspiel des Jahres 2020 KRITIKERPREIS

The Crew: The Quest for Planet 9
Designed by Thomas Sing

3-5 PLAYERS	20 MINS	AGES 10+	$15 MSRP

LUCK — STRATEGY

INTERACTIVE — INDEPENDENT

Gather what you need, avoid what you don't, and level up your adventurer by being the best prepared for the quest!

Each player is dealt an adventurer card and takes a storage mat. Each storage mat shows a grid of squares. All the item tiles are placed in the center of the table. These are double-sided, with a different item shown on either side. These tiles also vary in size.

Each round a quest card is drawn, which shows which types of items will score and which ones are forbidden. For example, a quest may require melee weapons and stealthy items, but forbid evil or metal items. Simultaneously, players start going through the tiles in the center. You may only use one hand and can only hold one item at a time, which you must either place on your mat or return to the pile. Once on your mat, an item cannot be moved or returned. An item must be placed so it exactly covers a certain number of squares. It cannot cover any part of another item on the mat.

Once a player has filled all the spaces on her mat, she takes the highest unclaimed ready card. When all these cards are gone the round ends.

Next, any items on the mats that match the forbidden categories are removed. This won't always be clear for all items. Players may attempt to persuade each other over the classification of an item. Everyone then votes on whether it fits inside a forbidden category or not.

Finally, players score one point for each item that match one of the quest's required item categories and lose one point for each set of two empty spaces on their mat. You also earn points equal to the number on your ready card. The player with the most points from the round wins that round. The first time you win, you flip your adventurer card over and unlock a penalty, such as an item type that will always be forbidden. The second time, you unlock a bonus ability, which offers some perk to help you. The third time, you win the game.

Last-Second Quest's real-time race for the right items is fast and fun. Voting on forbidden items can lead to some funny storytelling moments as you debate classifications. You want players who'll approach the voting in good faith, but with the right group the defense of items is one of the best aspects of the game. With limited quantities of each type of shape and a wide variety of different items, you often have to get creative when defending your choices to the rest of the group — and lots of laughter is the result.

Last Second Quest
Designed by Christian Giove

2-5 PLAYERS · **20 MINS** · **AGES 14+** · **$35 MSRP**

LUCK — STRATEGY

INTERACTIVE — INDEPENDENT
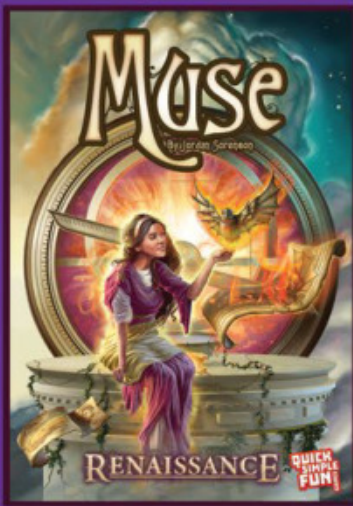
Muse: Renaissance

A Brand New individual scoring system, 80 all New Art Cards, and hours of Quick Simple Fun.

Available January 27th ,2021

FREIGHT CARS

Set in the near future, shipping by rail must be perfect, so you will need to Tetris your cargo in, and make sure the right cargo gets to the right city for its demand.
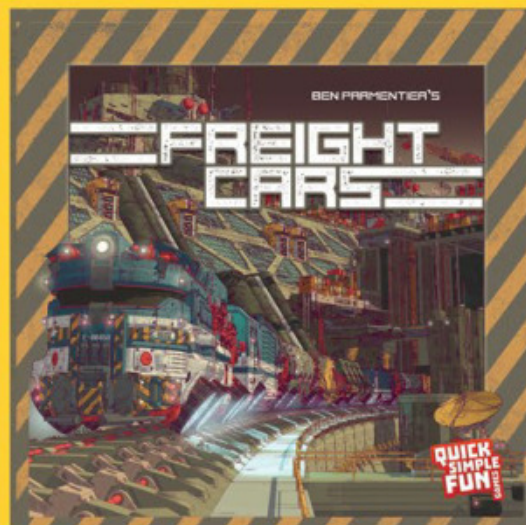
Available February 24th, 2021

RISE OF THE ROUND TABLE

DESIGNED BY DON RIDDLE

A Unique Movement and Action selection mechanism, combined with a chance to be a noble helping to make England a better nation, let's you make the choices to be the best Noble of the Land.

Coming to Kickstarter January 19th, 2021
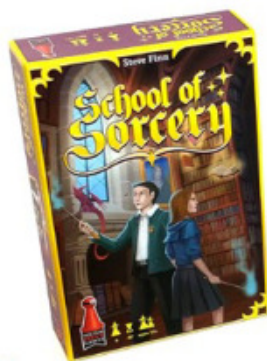
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SCHOOL OF SORCERY

School of Sorcery **is a two-player game of strategically predicting your opponent's moves, dice rolls, and magic.**

There are six numbered tiles. During setup, a sorcery card is dealt to the tiles numbered one through five, and the portal card is dealt to the tile numbered six. Each round, both players take five crystals and then roll their three dice. They select three of their six cast cards, assigning one to each of their dice, and reveal them simultaneously. The cast cards explain how many of your crystals you are assigning to that die (this can range from zero to three) and two can also flip a die to its opposite side.

After the cards are revealed, you place the appropriate number of crystals on the cards which are at the tiles whose numbers match your dice results. If any of your crystals get placed on the portal, you may then move them to any other card on the table. Next, you may use abilities of cards you've already won. These might do things such as move crystals around or allow more to be placed.

Next, you check each card on the table. In order to win a card, you must have a certain number of crystals on it and have a specific number of more crystals than your opponent. The numbers vary from card to card. If you meet these requirements, you take the card. Some cards have abilities that occur automatically when you win them.

If there are any empty tile spaces at the end of the round, you slide the portal and sorcery cards down the line of tiles, then draw new cards to fill any empty spaces. Whenever the portal reaches tile one, you automatically move it back to tile six. Any crystals you have not spent at the end of the round you keep for the next round. Players then take back the cast cards they used and a new round begins. Each card is worth a certain number of points. The first player to reach thirteen points wins the game.

School of Sorcery is an intriguing game in which you're trying to guess where your opponent will be moving, using card abilities to your advantage, and choosing which cards to go after. There is some luck in the dice rolls, but you have many ways to mitigate that luck with your cast cards as well as with the portal.

There's a lot of back-and-forth player interaction, as well as intriguing choices during the game. The situation on the table is constantly changing, plus there is a good amount of variation with the cards.

School of Sorcery
Designed by Steve Finn

2 PLAYERS	40 MINS	AGES 14+	$30 MSRP

LUCK — STRATEGY

INTERACTIVE — INDEPENDENT

Build a city that reaches to the clouds, laying walkways between your towers and earning points the longer they are.

Everyone places their start tile in front of themselves and draws a hand of three tiles. Every tile in the game shows two colored building locations, with the color telling you what height of building to place there. There are three different heights of buildings in the game. Whenever you place a tile, you also place the appropriate buildings on it.

On your turn you must place a tile in your city. One side must connect to another tile and all your tiles must fit inside a three-by-three grid. You then place the buildings on it. Next, you may choose to place any walkways between any two matching colored buildings in your city. The farther apart the buildings are, the more points the walkway is worth. A walkway cannot cross another walkway that is at the same height or cross a space that does not yet have a tile. Each building can only support two walkways. There are a limited number of walkway pieces of each length for each color of building. If a supply runs out, walkways cannot be built of that length for that color of building.

Finally, you draw a tile either from three face-up tiles on the table or from the draw deck. If you select from the face-up tiles, a new one is drawn to replace it. After eight rounds, the player with the most points from their walkways wins the game.

Cloud City is simple to learn, with intuitive rules. An included variant, which adds additional scoring goals based on building colors or the layout of your walkways,

adds an additional layer to the gameplay and the planning required as you play your tiles.

The fact that each color and length of walkway is limited adds a certain amount of player interaction to a game largely focused on building your own town. When a particular set of walkways starts to run low, you're paying a lot more attention to what other players are doing.

Cloud City's tactile element of building the city is lovely. The game brings an unusual mechanism to the table, as you think about each level of your city and the height of buildings as you lay out your tiles. *Cloud City* is also a visually satisfying game. It's enjoyable to put your city together, and the final result is fun to admire whether you won or not.

Cloud City
Designed by Phil Walker-Harding

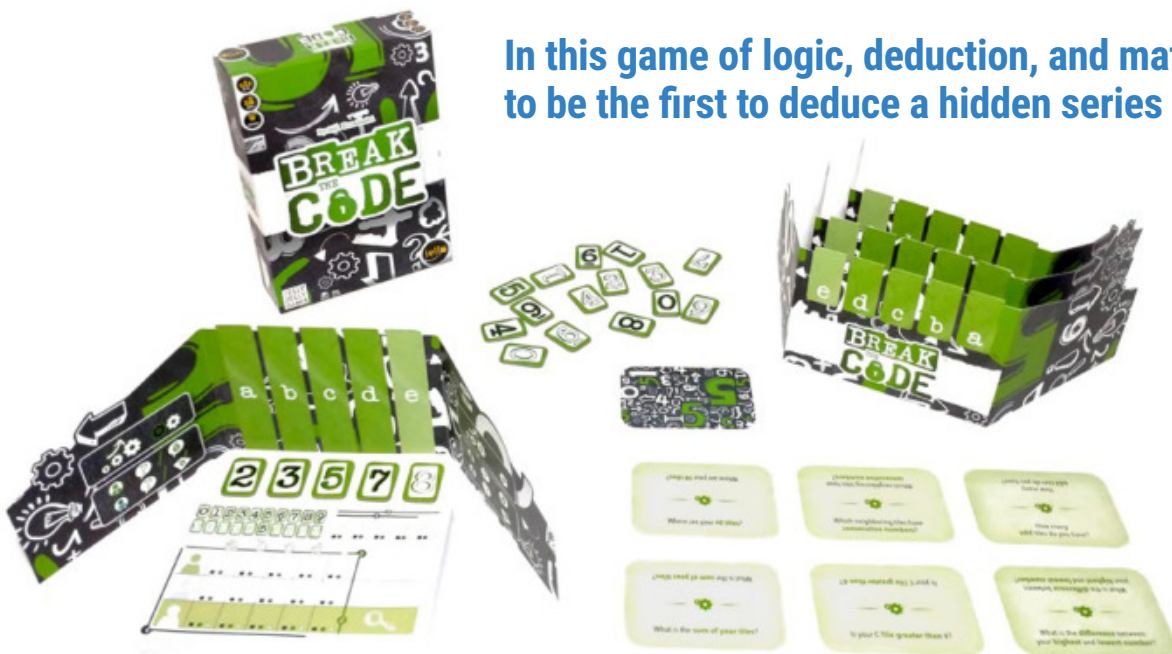| 2-4 PLAYERS	30-60 MINS	AGES 10+	$30 MSRP

LUCK — STRATEGY

INTERACTIVE — INDEPENDENT

In this game of logic, deduction, and math, players compete to be the first to deduce a hidden series of numbers.

Each player is given a screen. In a two player game, the cipher tiles are shuffled and five are dealt to each player. The tiles show the numbers zero through nine, with a black and a white copy for each number (except for the fives, which are both green). The tiles are placed in numerical order behind the screens. The screen shows lettered spaces, so that when players ask for and receive clues, it is easier to understand the positions of the tiles being referred to. For example, you can talk about the tile at position A or C. The question deck is then shuffled and six cards are drawn and placed in the center.

The goal of the game is to figure out your opponent's tiles (both the numbers and their colors). On your turn you select one of the six questions in the center and ask it. The card is then discarded and a new one is drawn.

Questions can include *"What is the sum of your three right-most tiles?"*, *"How many of your tiles have the same number?"*, and *"Where are your sixes?"* Instead of asking a question, you may attempt to guess the tiles. If you are wrong, your turn ends but you are not out of the game. If you are correct, you win (though if you were the starting player, your opponent gets a chance to guess your tiles and attempt to tie the game).

In a three or four player game, players are trying to guess tiles dealt face-down in the center of the table by eliminating the numbers dealt to their opponents. If you make an incorrect guess you are out of the game. In a three-player game, all other players must answer your question. In a four-player game, everyone — including you — must answer it.

Both modes come with their own challenges. In a two player game it's a head-to-head competition to solve the puzzle first, trying to decide the best way to use the questions on the table. In a three or four player game, you need to consider not only what information each question will get you but what information it will provide your opponents.

Break the Code is a game of pure deduction and logic. The layout of the sheets to track information is not intuitive at first, but the components are well made. The variety of the questions is clever, and they provide an interesting change from turn to turn. It's a clever puzzle, and one which is extremely satisfying to solve.

Break the Code
Designed by Ryohei Kurahashi

2-4 PLAYERS **15 MINS** **AGES 10+** **$17 MSRP**
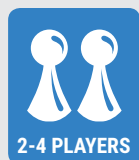
LUCK — STRATEGY

INTERACTIVE — INDEPENDENT

The reef is teeming with sea horses and starfish! Group them together by color or species to score as many points as possible.

The board is placed in the center of the table showing a six-by-six grid. The tiles are placed face-down and shuffled, then six are drawn and placed face-up to form the drafting pool. These tiles show six different kinds of sea creatures in six different colors. Both players agree who will score by creature type and who will score by color.

On your turn, you may move one tile already on the board in a straight line, any number of spaces (you must stop if it reaches another tile or the edge of the board). Then you select a tile from the draft and place it on any empty space on the board. Finally, you draw a new face-down tile and place it in the draft. The game ends when all tiles are placed. One player scores points for groups of adjacent matching sea creatures and the other player scores for matching colors. The more matching tiles in the group, the more points it is worth.

Aqualin's gameplay is simple and teachable in only a couple of minutes. It's a curious mixture of relaxing, simple mechanics paired with competitive back-and-forth mechanics. Players have plenty of choices, from the tile you draft to where you place it and what you move, while keeping the game fast and easy. The components are lovely, with the tiles nice and solid. It's an excellent two-player game that nicely accomplishes everything it sets out to do in a short amount of time.
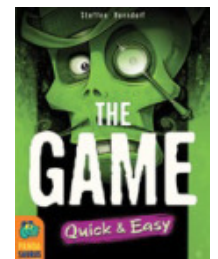
KOSMOS

Aqualin
Designed by Marcello Bertocchi

2 PLAYERS	20 MINS	AGES 8+	$20 MSRP

LUCK — STRATEGY

INTERACTIVE — INDEPENDENT

OTHER RECOMMENDED GAMES
For a complete list, visit CasualGameRevolution.com/games

CASUAL GAME RECOMMENDED

Calico is Major Fun!

The Concept

Your calico quilt starts as a pile of simple fabric in colorful floral patterns. Patiently you cut, fold, and sew each piece into precise shapes and designs. Your goal? Create a cozy refuge, an irresistible napping platform for every cat in the house. *Calico* is a charming tile laying game filled with beautiful strategy and art.

Players compete to create the best quilt. Will you focus on an overall design, embellish different areas with buttons, or attract a variety of fuzzy feline friends to help you score?

The Components

Calico is a beautiful game. Beth Sobel's illustrations do a masterful job of drawing in even the most casual player for a closer look. The adorable orange tabby cat curled up on the cover of the box sets the tone for the game. The world of *Calico* is a peaceful warm place on a cold night.

From the 108 colorful hexagonal patch tiles you'll use to create your quilt, to the whimsical button tokens and the five double sided cat scoring tiles (with matching cat tokens), *Calico* employs cuteness to a degree that should almost be illegal.

Each player has a thick-ridged quilt board on which you will place your patch tiles. There are three spaces marked on the quilt board for your design goals. Each player has six

design tiles, so three will be chosen and "sewn" onto your board before the game begins. Likewise, three cat scoring tiles will be selected at random for all players.

Mix up the patch tiles and place three face-up on the table. Then allow each player to draw a hand of two patch tiles and we're ready to play!

The Mechanics

The goal in *Calico* is to place patch tiles in your quilt to score the highest number of points. Designs, buttons, and cats each grant points in a variety of ways.

A turn in *Calico* is deceptively simple. There are two parts: place one patch tile into your quilt. This tile can go into any open space on the board. Then, draw a tile from the three face-up patch tiles available to refill your hand.

Once your turn is complete, a new patch tile is drawn from the bag to replace the face-up one you removed.

The game ends when every open space on each player's quilt board is filled with a tile. Each scoring category will be judged and the player with the highest point total will be awarded the title Master Quilter and win the game.

What Sets This Game Apart?

Calico is a game of layered strategy — of color and pattern. There are six colors of patch tile and six different patterns.

The challenge and delight in *Calico* comes from trying to weave different scoring combinations together with the placement of each colored and patterned tile.

In order to appreciate this aspect of the game, let's look at the three ways to score: buttons, cats, and designs.

Buttons score by color. For each grouping of at least three like-colored patch tiles, you place a button on your quilt. If you manage to place six different colored buttons on your quilt, you get a bonus rainbow button.

Cats score by pattern. Two pattern tiles are drawn to indicate each cat's favorite type of pattern at the beginning of the game. Each cat tile also shows a specific configuration of tiles or a specific number of tiles. If you can create that configuration or the right size group of tiles in one of the cat's favorite patterns, you get to place a cat token on your quilt. And every time you fulfill a cat's pattern preference, you get to place a new cat on your quilt. Some cats' preferences are easy to meet; others are considerably more difficult. Easy cats score fewer points; picky cats score more.

Design tiles can score by color AND pattern. Each design tile maps out a recipe describing a specific combination of tiles needed to surround it.

For example, a design tile might want to be surrounded by three like tiles of one type and three of another.

You could fulfill this recipe by placing three green tiles and three blue tiles around it. You could also fulfill the recipe by placing three striped tiles and three polka dot tiles around it. With some careful consideration and tile placement, you could score this design tile both ways!

Buttons, cats, and designs are independent ways for you to score but their needs will overlap and conflict from the moment you place your very first patch tile on the board.

To gain points in one area, you most often have to be willing to forgo points in others. The delicious fun and agony of *Calico* comes from these decisions. Want a quilt covered in cats? You'll most likely give up making elaborate designs. Decide to focus on buttons? Cats may look elsewhere to nap.

Final Thoughts

Calico is not a game about perfection. Your final quilt won't be perfect. It's a game about creating something of beauty with what you have on hand. Your decisions create the beauty in the game. And this makes it truly satisfying when you are able to mesh several scoring opportunities together by placing a single tile.

Calico will entice you to grab your thimble, put on some music, and pour yourself a nice cuppa tea. This peaceful game harbors simple beauty and hidden depth. That makes *Calico* a wellspring of Major Fun and a worthy recipient of our Spiel of Approval. ⊡

Stephen Conway is the director of The Spiel Foundation, a non-profit organization dedicated to making the world a more playful place.

Among other things, Stephen oversees two internationally recognized game award programs The Major Fun Award and The Spiel of Approval.

For more information visit: thespielfoundation.com, thespiel.net, and majorfun.com
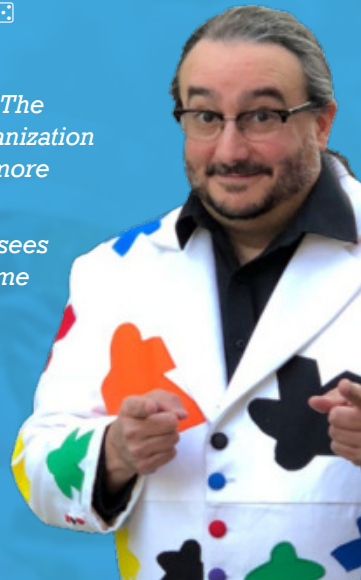
Calico
Designed by Kevin Russ, Art by Beth Sobel
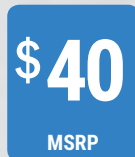Published by Flatout Games, AEG

1-4 PLAYERS | **30-45 MINS** | **AGES 13+** | **$40 MSRP**

Time to Teach/Learn: 5-8 minutes

Your Turn!

CGI

A Spotlight on the Gaming Community

How Have Games Changed Your Life?

"I'm constantly broke."

— Ben T.

CGI HONESTY AWARD

"I have run out of room in my house!"

— Nadine S.

"I'm able to stretch my creativity and have fun comparing skill and chatting with friends."

— Andrew H.

"My parents both worked for Hasbro for over 30 years, as it was right down the street, so it was our childhood. We played every day, and gaming also taught us to speak English, as my parents came to America in 1968."

— Diane S.

HASBRO ®

"I always wondered how I would keep my brain active as I aged. I figured it would be something like crossword puzzles, but now I know it'll be board games."

— Edward P.

"I have finally found a hobby that serves as an engaging mind activity, provides a social option, and continually challenges me to be open to a larger, ever-expanding community."
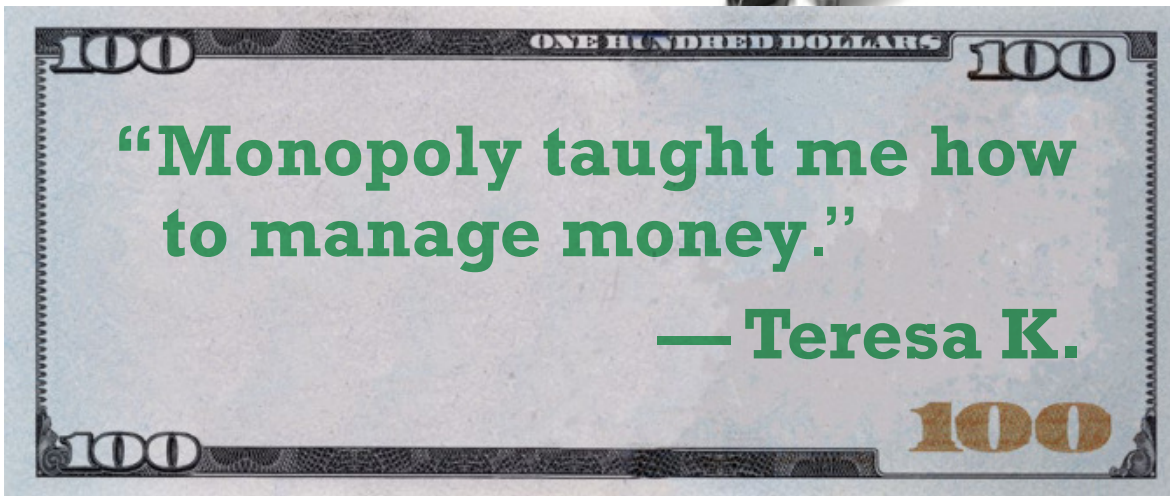
— Justin D.

"I spend too much time collecting them, not enough playing.'"

— Joe H.

"I can't see the walls in my game room!"

— Aaron S.

"Monopoly taught me how to manage money."

— Teresa K.

"I have saved so much money, and met some amazing people! They are great for keeping your brain sharp, too!"

— Amber W.

"Board games have brought my family together! We all experienced some depression during quarantine and now we play board games every Friday night and it cheers everyone up! It's something that we definitely all look forward to."

— Tammy P.

"I feel like they've made me think about cause and effect differently. Being good at board games relies on being able to predict the chain of events your choices cause."

— Pete D.

"They have taught me how competition can make me better at life."

— Johnathan P.

"Board games help me get to know new friends better in a fun, non-threatening way.'"

— J.T. Miller.

"I'm obsessed with them from the first time I attended Gen Con. I love the people in the hobby and spending time around the table."

— Robert H.

"Board games made my childhood much easier. When I had no playmates, I played board games by myself with imaginary opponents."

— Selene M.

Send your ideas and photos to: editor@CasualGameRevolution.com

Experience the horror of The Shining like never before!

THE SHINING™

ESCAPE FROM THE OVERLOOK HOTEL GAME

🔍 A Coded Chronicles® Game

"Wendy, I'm Home"

Can you get Wendy and Danny out of the Overlook Hotel while avoiding the axe-wielding Jack? Come play with us in The Shining: Escape from the Overlook Hotel, where 1 or more players take on the roles of Wendy and Danny and work together to search for a way out! Use psychic abilities like "the shining" to solve challenging puzzles, but beware of Jack and the hotel itself, which are conspiring to keep the Torrance family captive forever...and ever...and ever.

40th anniversary of the classic horror film

Take on the roles of Danny and Wendy

1 or more players
4 narrative journals

1101

Wendy quickly scans the room
towards a counter filled with
something she can use there!

"Wendy, listen," Jack pleads
I'll forget the whole damned t

• Reveal Card 1.

LOOK
1 101

Envelope 1

Secret envelopes hold more than 50 coded clues!

🔍 **A Coded Chronicles® Game**

About Coded Chronicles: Coded Chronicles is an at-home escape room style game where players are guided to unlock clues and solve puzzles by a unique code-revealing mechanic. Each game contains its own storyline and objective to offer an unpredictable gameplay experience!

Limited Quantities. Order Today!